

In Another World With My Smartphone

24

Patora Fuyuhara
illustration • Eiji Usatsuka



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“GHAGH!”

“WHAGH?!”

The ‘something’ made a strange noise, rolled off me, and landed on the couch right next to me. It wasn’t a something at all. It was a someone. A girl.

“DADDY!”

Where’d she come from?!

Wait, no way...





THE CIRCUS COMES TO BRUNHILD!

“GRHHH...”

**“THERE
WE GO.
GOOD BOY!
SORRY, BUT
I NEED TO
RIDE YOU.
TAKE ME
TO PEOPLE,
OKAY?”**

The stare from his right eye, filled with green-gold light, seemed to pierce the Snow Wolf to its core. In a matter of seconds, the hulking canine grew docile and fell to the ground, resting on its stomach.



Character Profiles



Elze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The elder of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. A ferocious melee fighter, she makes use of gauntlets in combat. Her personality is fairly to-the-point and blunt. She can make use of Null fortification magic, specifically the spell **[Boost]**. She loves spicy foods.



Yumina Urnea Belfast

One of Touya's wives. Princess of the Belfast Kingdom. She was twelve years old in her initial appearance, and her eyes are heterochromatic. The right is blue, while the left is green. She has mystic eyes that can discern the true character of an individual. She has three magical aptitudes: Earth, Wind, and Darkness. She's also extremely proficient with a bow and arrow. She fell in love with Touya at first sight.



Mochizuki Touya

A highschooler who was accidentally murdered by God. He's a no-hassle kind of guy who likes to go with the flow. He's not very good at reading the atmosphere, and typically makes rash decisions that bite him in the ass. His mana pool is limitless, he can flawlessly make use of every magical element, and he can cast any Null spell that he wants. He's currently the Grand Duke of Brunhild.



Sushie Urnea Ortlinde

One of Touya's wives. She was ten years old in her initial appearance. Her nickname is Sue. The niece of Belfast's king, and Yumina's cousin. Touya saved her from being attacked on the road. She has an innocently adventurous spirit.



Lucia Leah Regulus

One of Touya's wives. The Third Princess of the Regulus Empire, she's Yumina's age. She fell in love with Touya when he saved her during a coup. She likes to fight with twin blades, and she's on good terms with Yumina.



Kokonoe Yae

One of Touya's wives. A samurai girl from the far eastern land of Eashen, a country much like Japan. She tends to repeat herself and speak formally, she does. Yae is quite a glutton, eating more than most normal people would dare touch. She's a hard worker, but can sometimes slack off. Her family runs a dojo back in Eashen, and they take great pride in their craft. It's not obvious at first, but her boobs are pretty big.



Linze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The younger of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. She wields magic, specifically from the schools of Light, Water, and Fire. She finds talking to people difficult due to her own shy nature, but she is known to be surprisingly bold at times. Rumors say she might be the kind of girl who enjoys male on male romance... She loves sweet foods.



Paula

A stuffed toy bear animated by years upon years of the **[Program]** spell. She's the result of two-hundred years of programmed commands, making her seem like a fully aware living being. Paula... Paula's the worst!



Sakura

A mysterious girl Touya rescued in Eashen. She had lost her memories, but has now finally gotten them back. Her true identity is Farnese Forneus, daughter of the Xenoahs Overlord. Currently living a peaceful life in Brunhild, and she has joined the ranks of Touya's wives.



Leen

One of Touya's wives. Former Clan Matriarch of the Fairies, she now serves as Brunhild's Court Magician. She claims to be six-hundred-and-twelve years old, but looks tremendously young. She can wield every magical element except Darkness, meaning her magical proficiency is that of a genius. Leen is a bit of a light-hearted bully.



Hildegard Minas Lestia

One of Touya's wives. First Princess of the Knight Kingdom Lestia. Her swordplay talents earned her a reputation as a 'Knight Princess'. Touya saved her life when she was attacked by a group of Phrase, and she's loved him ever since. She's a good friend of Yae, and she stammers a bit when flustered.



Luli

The fourth of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Azure Monarch, the ruler of dragons. She often clashes with Kohaku due to her condescending personality.



Kougyoku

The third of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Flame Monarch, ruler of feathered things. Though her appearance is flashy and extravagant, she's actually quite cool and collected.



Sango and Kokuyou

The second of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. They are the Black Monarch, two in one. The rulers of scaled beasts. They can freely manipulate water. Sango is a tortoise, and Kokuyou is a snake. Sango is a female, and Kokuyou is a male (but he's very much a female at heart).



Kohaku

The first of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She's the White Monarch, the ruler of beasts, the guardian of the west and a beautiful White Tiger. She can create devastating shockwaves, and also change size at will.



High Rosetta

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Workshop, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Rosetta for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #27. For whatever reason, she's the most reliable of the bunch.



Francesca

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hanging Garden, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Cesca for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #23. She likes to tell very inappropriate jokes.



Mochizuki Moroha

The God of Swords. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She trains the and advises the knights of Brunhild. She's gallant and brave, but also a bit of an airhead at times.



Mochizuki Karen

The God of Love. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She stays in Brunhild because she says she needs to catch a servile god, but doesn't really do all that much in the way of hunting him. She's a total pain in the butt.



Pamela Noël

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Tower, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Noel for short and wears a jersey. Her Airframe Serial Number is #25. She sleeps all the time, and eats laying down. Her tremendous laziness means she doesn't do all that much.



Preliora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Rampart, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Liora for short and wears a blazer. Her Airframe Serial Number is #20. She's the oldest of the Babylon Gynoids, and would attend to the... Personal night-time needs of Doctor Babylon herself. She has no experience with men.



Fredmonica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hangar, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Monica for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #28. She's a funny little hard worker who has a bit of a casual streak. She's a good friend of Rosetta, and is the Gynoid with the most knowledge of the Frame Gears.



Bell Flora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Alchemy Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Flora for short and wears a nurse outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #21. A nurse with dangerously big boobs and even more dangerous medicines.



Doctor Regina Babylon

An ancient genius from a lost civilization, reborn into an artificial body that resembles a small girl. She is the "Babylon" that created the many artifacts and forgotten technologies scattered around the world today. Her Airframe serial number is #29. She remained in stasis for five-thousand years before finally being awakened.



Atlantica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Research Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Tica for short. Her Airframe serial number is #22. Of the Babylon Numbers, she is the one who best embodies Doctor Babylon's inappropriately perverse side.



Lileleparshe

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Storehouse, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Parshe for short and wears a shrine maiden outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #26. She's tremendously clumsy, even if she's just trying to help. The amount of stuff she ruins is troublingly high.



Irisfam

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Library, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Fam for short and wears a school uniform. Her Airframe Serial Number is #24. She's a total book fanatic and hates being interrupted when she's reading.

The Story So Far!

Mochizuki Touya, wielding a smartphone customized by God himself, continues to live his life in a newly formed double-world! The war against the Wicked God, which threatened the existence of two innocent worlds, has finally come to an end. Touya has emerged victorious, but at what cost? Now he's saddled with divine duties! Awakened to godliness! Our hapless young lad is to be caretaker of the newly-created world. Fortunately, things seem to be at peace. But could this only be a surface observation? The seeds of discord are sown out of sight, and chaos could very well burst from the dark... How will Touya fare in his new station? Only time will tell.

The Worlds of In Another World With My Smartphone World Map





Chapter I: The Wicked Devout

“Come to think of it...what Null magic can you use?”

It'd been a day since Arcia had arrived at the castle. She'd hounded me to take her to the nearby market, so that's where we were.

“My Null magic? I can use **[Search]** and **[Apport]**. The range on them is rather short, however, so there's little to no tactical application. Therefore, I mostly use them for easy access to ingredients while I cook.”

“Huh, that's a pretty novel usage...”

[Search] was handy for foraging in the wild, while **[Apport]** made it easy to harvest fruit from high places. If she was finding use out of it in such a simple way, that was fine... Probably.

“I can also use it to identify poisoned or rotten ingredients.”

That seemed smart. I'd used **[Search]** to find poison before. It actually seemed like a pretty useful spell for a cook to have.

“Ah, father! They have apples! I'd like to make an apple pie, so let's buy some!”

“Do you make a lot of desserts, Arcia?”

“If anything, I'd say they're my specialty! You're not the biggest fan of sweet treats, but my siblings constantly ask for them.”

It's not that I don't like sweet stuff, I just can't eat too many of them...

If I were able to, I'd certainly have eaten a great many cakes. But there simply reached a point where my stomach and tongue could take no more. The mystery of how women could consume dessert after dessert boggled my mind, even now.

Yae was capable of eating a whole cake in one fell swoop... Though that was more on account of her being a Yae than her being a woman.

Maybe I should buy something to bring back for the kids?

Just as I was wondering what to buy, the crowd around me started to murmur and stir. What were they getting so worked up about?

“Huh? What’s that up in the sky?”

“Beats me. One of the grand duke’s newest magic whatsits, probably?”

I glanced upward and, sure enough, there was some kind of flying object far off above the clouds... It was slowly moving forward.

“[Long Sense].”

I projected my vision into the air to try to make some sense of this unidentified flying object.

Is that...an airship?

Beneath the rugby ball-shaped gasbag, I could see a flight deck flanked by two winged propellers. The hull had a pair of long armlike parts protruding from the front.

It wasn’t a magical artifact like people around here expected, but an invention from the western continent, the former Reverse World. It was probably a Golem of some sort.

I wondered what they wanted from me... I didn’t like taking new arrivals without advance warning, but we didn’t really have any set precedent when it came to airspace violations.

Golems that large were usually exclusively owned by the rich and powerful, or states themselves. Either way, it meant whoever was in that thing was probably a big deal.

I'd heard Golem airships weren't capable of traversing huge distances either...so I couldn't help but wonder where this thing was from. One thing was clear, though. I couldn't just stand by and wait to see what it did. I didn't think they were hostile, but I also couldn't really afford to gamble.

"Let's go, Arcia."

Arcia was still looking over the apples when I grabbed her hand and invoked **[Teleport]**. We vanished, then reappeared at the northern training field.

I pulled Reginleif out of **[Storage]** and clambered up to the cockpit. It was designed for a single pilot, but there was enough room for a small child to squeeze in with me.

Well, I was hardly gonna leave her behind...but why's she sitting on my lap? It's hard to see the monitor from here...

I activated Reginleif and launched up into the sky. In a flash, I flew in front of the airship and activated my **[Speaker]** spell to project my voice ahead.

"Attention, incoming airship. This airspace falls under the territory of the Duchy of Brunhild. Disembark immediately and make your reasons for entry known. Should sufficient time pass without a response, we will be forced to remove you from our airspace."

I figured I'd just issue a warning. It could lead to them becoming hostile, or maybe they'd change course. It'd be annoying if they went to a different country, though... Air travel was still a relatively unknown thing on the eastern continent, so I figured I'd make it a topic of discussion next time all the world leaders gathered.

To be honest, one **[Fireball]** shot would be enough to bring the whole thing crashing down... Provided it didn't have some kind of protective barrier, anyway.

“Father, it’s making a descent.”

“Oh, guess they’re listening.”

I brought Reginleif down to the ground, parking it in tandem with the airship.

A long, leglike landing gear emerged from the hull, allowing the airship to quietly settle on a nearby hill.

I left Arcia in the cockpit and hopped out, ready to greet whoever was inside this thing. The hatch opened...and various people came out. A few of them even looked like dwarves. I wondered if they were the ship’s mechanics.

Huh? What the...?

An old man with a bushy, bearlike mustache was sprinting toward me at full pelt. His eyes were glimmering and he was yelling incoherent stuff.

The hell is he doing?!

“[Shield]!”

“Gwaugh!”

The old man collided with the invisible barrier and fell backward. His nose was completely busted, his mustache soaked with blood.

What the hell, man?! How fast did you wanna run into that thing?

“Don’t just start chargin’ at them outta nowhere! Ya got rusty parts fer brains?!”

A gorgeous woman suddenly appeared, kicking the old man repeatedly in the side. She looked to be in her thirties.

...What is going on?

“Sorry for the shock there, partner. This moron saw that fancy Golem of yours and couldn’t help himself.”

“R-Right...”

Reginleif's not a Golem, but I'll put that aside for now.

The woman chuckled slightly as she stomped on the man some more. It was...quite the sight to behold, honestly. Her light brown hair was tied up and she wore coarse-looking gray coveralls. She had a greasy towel at her waist and a leather bag of tools tied to her side. She was the very picture of a craftswoman.

I glanced down at the mustached man again and noticed that he was dressed the same. The two were likely Golem engineers.

“The rumors about this place really were true, eh? Worth the trip from Gandhilis, that's fer sure!”

“Gandhilis? So you're envoys from the Steel Nation?”

Gandhilis, the Steel Nation, was a mining country south of Allent and east of Gardio. It was abundant in natural resources, so they exported a lot of the materials required to make Golems.

“Naw, not quite. We're just from Gandhilis. Ain't here on nothin' official. We're a group called the Seekers.”

...Seekers? Think I've heard of that before... Oh, right! They're that group on the same level as Elluka! One of the five great gollemancers!

“We're an engineerin' guild. Since we're a collective, our title applies to the group an' no one person. By the by, that sorry sack'a screws on the floor next to me is Mario Phalanx, of Gilmouth. I'm Ripple Phalanx, his lady fair.”

“Wait, you're married?!”

Why were you kicking him, then?! That's domestic abuse!

I felt a little sorry for the guy, honestly.

Mario, huh? With that mustache? Yeah, that tracks.

“Wait...are you two Parullel’s parents?”

When I said that, Ripple’s eyes went wide.

“You know our daughter?”

“Well, I met her once. She was with the princess of Gandhilis...”

It was back when we held that matchmaking party in Refreese. Parullel and Princess Cornelia had masterminded a plan to switch out one of the attendees with a Gollem replacement. And that meant these two were the ones who created that Gollem... Or rather, they were the two who’d restored it.

“By the way, you ain’t introduced yourself yet.”

“Oh, my bad. I’m Mochizuki Touya, the grand duke of Brunhild. I run things around here.”

“Y-Yer the ruler’a the country?!”

When I mentioned who I was, she started freaking out. It was a sight I’d seen many times before, so I wasn’t surprised... I just wondered when I’d have the presence or royal air required for people to know at a glance. Maybe I needed a beard...

“...Uhhh, well, please fergive my hubby’s disrespectful conduct... An’ my own, obviously.”

“Nah, I wouldn’t worry about that. I was originally an adventurer, so you don’t need to put on airs with me.”

“Whew! S’a relief to me. Our lot don’t got much in the way’a decorum an’ whatnot. S’why I left our little lass with the princess.”

Ripple looked more than relieved by my words. Did she think I was gonna arrest her husband or something?

“So, uh, what brings you guys to Brunhild?”

“Oh, aye. Two reasons. One, to see yer giant Gollems like that one up close. Two, we heard Elluka’s kickin’ about here. Can we see her?”

They know Elluka? Guess that makes sense, since she’s one of the five great gollemancers... The Restoration Queen, as I recall. What do they want with her, though?

“Before that, though...I’d love to take a lookit this thing up close an’ personal,” Ripple said as she suddenly pointed over at Reginleif, her eyes burning with all the same fervor I’d seen in Mario’s earlier.

W-Welp... She’s clearly just as nutty about tech as he is.

“Well, I guess you can take a look...”

“Hear that, lads? We got consent!”

“HOOOOOOOOOH!”

The ground rumbled as dwarves and men charged full steam ahead toward Reginleif.

“Wot’s it made of? Ain’t mythrill’re orichalcum, izzit?”

“Hey! The armor plating has magical stuff coated right over it!”

“How’s it supportin’ all that bulk on these slim legs?!”

It was a weird sight, seeing a group of mostly middle-aged men clinging and scuttling around Reginleif’s feet like they were ants. I wondered if all tech fanatics were like this...

“E-Eek! Father! Th-This is scary!”

“Oh, oops...”

I looked up at Arcia, who was sitting in the cockpit and trembling at the sight of the weird old guys crawling all over the mech. She was a gold or silver rank adventurer, so she was hardly in any danger, but she was probably too understandably freaked out by the situation to think like that.

I used **[Fly]** to zoom up and rescue Arcia, and the moment we came down, the hungry-eyed mechanics started crawling up even higher...

Damn it, guys. I thought you just wanted to look!

I quickly packed my Reginleif back into **[Storage]** and pulled out a Chevalier in its place. I didn't want them damaging my masterpiece.

"There's another one?!"

The men immediately started swarming the Chevalier. They were like ants. Even Mario scrambled up, apparently having fully recovered from his busted nose, to clamber over the Chevalier's foot.

"Gosh, son... This is plenty crazy. How many'a these things you got?"

"You mean, like, how many Frame Gears? Probably a bit less than a thousand."

"A th-thousand?!" Ripple roared, then froze in disbelief.

I'd stopped mass-producing the Frame Gears after we beat the wicked god, so it wasn't as many as there could've been. The main thing Brunhild used them for nowadays was killing Behemoths, since they'd started popping up a little more frequently all over the world. They were also used for disaster prevention and general relief efforts. I had a feeling that if the engineers from both east and west put their minds together, they'd be able to make something good based on the technology... Nothing like those shoddy knock-offs I'd destroyed a while back at least.

I had a feeling these guys were itching to put their creative minds to use. But there was no point pondering on their intentions just yet. I decided to call up Elluka and see what she had to say first.

◇ ◇ ◇

"Hm? What's going on here?" Doc Babylon, who'd come down with Elluka after I'd called, couldn't help but mutter in disbelief upon seeing the group of engineers crowding around the Chevalier.

“Don’t ask me, they’re just doing what they want...”

“They’re just excited to see some rare magitech. They’re like little kids, really. It’s cute. I wouldn’t worry about it.”

“Mh... If it’s botherin’ ya that much, I can always make ’em knock it off.”

At Elluka’s words, Ripple grinned and waved around the wrench in her hand.

...Don’t think you need to go that far, right? You don’t need to beat them up!

“Ohoooh! This is a very rare Gollem airship! Is this mithril?! Wait, it’s partially composed of high-mithril, isn’t it?! That’s genius! It’ll help absorb impacts considerably...”

My daughter, Quun, was freaking out about the Seekers’ airship. It didn’t seem all that different from how they were freaking out about our Frame Gear, sadly.

That was definitely like her... The moment I’d mentioned the group had come here, she’d charged down from Babylon with the others.

“She’s always the same, that girl...” Arcia mumbled as she gazed over at her sister and shook her head.

Quun, snap out of it... You’re gonna lose some of your sister’s respect!

Elluka glanced over at me with a shrug, then turned to Ripple.

“So, why Brunhild? You didn’t come this far just to see little old me, did you?”

“Oh, yer sayin’ we oughta not’ve come to see ya, then? Psh... Well, it ain’t a leisure visit. There’s somethin’ we need you to look at,” Ripple said, then reached into her breast pocket and pulled out a few sheets

of paper. They looked to be photographs...or at least very photorealistic sketches.

“Oh my...”

“Mhm. These’re the latest excavations from our Gandhilis dig. Know anythin’ about it?”

“It’s some kind of ship, surely... But that size...”

I glanced over from behind Elluka to get a good look at the pictures. The snapshots showed what appeared to be some kind of massive underground dock, and docked there was an equally massive ship. The person standing next to it in the photo was so dwarfed by it that it had to be half the size of one of the Babylon islands.

...This ship looks...kind of like a spaceship, doesn’t it?

“This must be a vessel from an ancient civilization! Wait, that mark... Is that emblem...?” Elluka trailed off and stared at the image in disbelief. There was an insignia etched into the ship’s hull, and I vaguely recognized what it meant too...

“That’s the same mark all the crown Gollems have!”

“Precisely... This ship may have been built by Chrom Ranchesse, the genius from the far past. He created the crowns, after all.”

Chrom Ranchesse was a brilliant man from the far past who’d used his vast abilities to create the black and white crown Gollems, utilizing their power to transcend the space and time barrier between the regular and Reverse Worlds. What’s more, he was the one who’d stopped the Phrase invasion five thousand years ago, even if it was incidental. However, the white crown going into overdrive caused him to lose all his memories...

“Don’t tell me the ship itself could be a crown... That’s impossible, right?!”

“It ain’t impossible, but s’hard to say right now. We couldn’t get in the ship to investigate, y’see. S’why I figured we oughta investigate the crowns a bit more closely an’ get some clues. I heard the black, white, an’ red ones were here, so yeah.”

Makes sense... So Ripple and the others came here to look into the crowns... The purple one’s here too, but it’s not exactly good at communicating.

“The blue an’ green crowns belong to royals, so we figured comin’ out here would be our best bet, y’know?”

“The white crown technically belongs to a royal family too, just saying...”

Illuminati Albus, the white crown, was provisionally contracted to Yumina, which meant it was tied to the Brunhild royal family.

“It’s barely been a year since your wife made a contract with it, Touya. The blue and green crowns have been with their royals for generations. It’s hard enough just meeting a crown, and by requesting an audience, they’d have to make those royal families privy to the discovery of the great ship. We should be thankful they came to us, as it means they trust us with the information!”

That made a lot of sense. The ship was a massive discovery, and any country would probably have loved to have gotten their hands on that kind of information. I didn’t personally have an interest in it, so they were smart in coming to us. We had similar stuff in Babylon’s hangar anyway.

I guess if they wanna talk to Albus, that’s fine...

I was suddenly pulled from my inner monologue by a tugging at my sleeve.

“Father! This is incredible! An ancient Gollem...and one created by the crowns’ progenitor at that?! What a discovery!”

Oh crap... Forgot to account for my fanatic of a daughter.

I didn't know how long she'd been staring at the pictures, but Quun's eyes were brimming with a curious light.

"Hoh... I'm rather interested in this, Touya. I think we should investigate."

I turned toward Doc Babylon and let out a small sigh.

Dammit... Guess I can't just pawn this off and call it a day, huh? Well, whatever. Time to grab Yumina and Albus, I guess!

◇ ◇ ◇

"A ship? Constructed by Chrom Ranchesse? Probable outcome: The Ark," Illuminati Albus, the white crown, said plainly.

"The...Ark?"

"The Ark. Chrom Ranchesse's mobile factory. Crowns such as myself were produced there."

...So it's a moving structure for creating Gollems? That's pretty similar to Babylon's workshop...

According to Albus, Chrom Ranchesse was an eccentric wanderer who'd pledged allegiance to no particular country. Thus, he roamed the land in his mobile ship-cum-fortress, the Ark.

I couldn't help but notice the similarities he had to a certain annoying doctor in my own entourage.

"Hey, Albus... There aren't nine Arks, are there? Please tell me there aren't."

"Negative. As far as I am aware, there is only one."

Oh, thank goodness...

"I was scared for a minute there."

Ripple, who was standing nearby with the rest of her Seekers, suddenly spoke up.

“So, uh, how d’we get into this ark’a yours?”

“We crowns are the key. Any of us should be able to open it.”

I see...

“So the crowns themselves are the only way to access it. No wonder they couldn’t get into it.”

“Mister Grand Duke... Wouldja be able to lend us yer white crown? We really need to start investigating that ship...” Mario, the old mustachioed man, said and turned his pleading eyes my way. But as sympathetic as I felt, I couldn’t just lend it out to him that easily.

“Well, I’m not sure...”

“Father! I have an idea! Send me over there with Albus as a representative of Brunhild! It’ll be a fine act to benefit our international—”

“Denied. You think we aren’t aware of your lustful gaze for all things technological? I see through you, girl.” Leen coldly rejected Quun’s proposal. I wasn’t too surprised, to be honest.

“Mother, please!”

I was actually somewhat interested in this Ark, though. If it was the ancient legacy of the master gollemancer who’d crafted the crowns, then it had to be of considerable historical value. Though, more importantly than that, the power of the Ark was a complete mystery, so it felt like I was obligated to investigate in case it housed some vast and terrible ability that could be misused.

“If it’s Chrom Ranchesse’s workshop, then I must see it! We could decipher the mysteries of the crowns!”

“Indeed, I’m rather curious as well. How can you expect us to hold back when it comes to unknown technology, Touya?”

Elluka and Babylon were both staring at me as if they’d already made their minds up.

Now hold on! If I let you go, then Quun’ll get mad! Agh, whatever... There’s not much I can do here...

I’d been wanting to visit Gandhilis at least once. Princess Cordelia had mentioned that the ruler of the country was a kind and gentle man.

“All right... We’ll escort Albus to the ruins with you. Is that okay, Yumina?”

“Of course. No objections here.”

Albus belonged to the Brunhild royal family, but he was still contracted to Yumina. That was why it was only polite to ask for proper permission.

“Father! If you’re going, then I’m going! I can’t miss out on this!”

“No fair, father! If she goes, then I get to go as well!”

“You two...” I groaned quietly as Quun and Arcia started bickering right next to me.

Fine, you can join me... But this isn’t a grand day out, you know? It’s serious stuff!

◇ ◇ ◇

“WHOOAAAAA! WE’RE FAST! IT’S CRAZY FAST!”

The old man, Mario, looked out the window as the scenery flew by. He was hopping up and down like a little kid. And it wasn’t just Mario who was so fervently freaking out either...all the old guys of the Seekers were in the same boat.

We were currently aboard the Balmung, a high-speed aircraft built by Doctor Babylon.

We realized it'd take weeks to return to Gandhilis if we went with the Seekers in their airship. I'd also never been to Gandhilis, so opening up a **[Gate]** wasn't an option. That was when Doc Babylon spoke up, saying she had a little something in the hangar. It was a high-speed airship built to transport Frame Gears nearly five thousand years ago. I never had a reason to use it before, since I could just freely teleport around, but it definitely came in handy when transporting large groups.

The Seekers were concerned about their airship, so I put it in my **[Storage]**.

Seekers aside, I was accompanied by Yumina, Leen, Quun, Lu, Arcia, Doc Babylon, and Elluka. Albus, Fenrir, and Paula were also there.

"God... Never thought I'd see an airship kickin' about like this... They got lotsa these here on yer continent?"

"Not really, no. Only in Brunhild. This country doesn't exactly adhere to rules of common sense, especially not its crazy leader. It's a rather psychotic nation, all things considered."

I couldn't help but overhear a rather rude conversation going on between Ripple and Elluka.

The only psycho in Brunhild is Doc Babylon! Blame her for all this!

As I grumbled internally, Yumina simply sighed and muttered something about me needing to see things in more objective terms. What did she mean by that?

"At this speed, we ought to be in Gandhilis within the hour." Doc Babylon had glanced at the time on her phone before speaking. Balmung operated on a sophisticated autopilot, so we'd make it there even if we all fell asleep.

It'd have probably been faster if I'd used **[Fly]** and opened up a **[Gate]** over there, but the old geezers were far too enamored by Balmung, so they promptly rejected that idea. Quun quite passionately rejected my plan as well. An hour wasn't too much to waste, though, so it wasn't worth throwing a tantrum over.

Doc Babylon and Elluka were chatting about complex stuff with Ripple and Mario, while Quun listened in with great interest. Albus and Fenrir were also muttering about something, but it didn't seem all that spirited a conversation. Paula was just kind of walking around in circles. Lu and Arcia had busied themselves on Balmung's kitchen deck and had argued with each other over who would bring me food. They ended up bringing me way too much, though! I quietly apologized to the girls and shared the vast servings with the old men. I couldn't help but chuckle at how similar Lu and Arcia were, even as they grumbled.

"Hm, is this the place?"

"Ayup. That's the Pistes Mountains. We're in Gandhilis territory now," Mario said and nodded in response to Doc Babylon. We'd clearly been flying for longer than I'd thought.

We headed toward the bridge and looked out the windows. The mountainous view fit the rugged descriptions I'd been given of Gandhilis. There were mountain basins spread out with towns and settlements built into them, as well as long, winding mountain roads that connected them.

"Wait... Tunnel systems?"

"Built by the dwarves in ages past. Some by hand, but most were done by specialized Golems," Ripple casually answered my question.

Dwarves, huh...? Guess they're stereotypically miners, so that tracks... I glanced over at a group of dwarves among the Seekers as I had that thought.

“Should be coming up right about now... Huh? Wait, that’s not right...” Mario mumbled those words and squinted his eyes as he looked ahead. There was smoke rising into the air from the foot of the mountain.

“Is that the entrance to the ruins?”

“Sure is. S’where the Gandhilis knights and the exploratory engineers are stationed... But what’s with the smoke?”

“Where there’s smoke, there’s fire...” Doctor Babylon made a comment that I very much agreed with.

“[Long Sense]!”

I projected my senses into the smoke. It was far thicker closer to the entrance. Various tents had been torn open or set ablaze...and there were various pieces of destroyed Gollems strewn about as well. Presumably, they were combat Gollems owned by the Gandhilis military.

“I can’t get a full read on the situation, but there’s clearly been an attack. There are a bunch of trashed Gandhilis Gollems around the area.”

“What’d you say?!” Ripple exclaimed. She couldn’t help but express her shock upon hearing those words.

Doc Babylon moved to Balmung’s pilot seat and increased our speed. Once we got close enough to see the situation out the window, a look of horror dawned on everyone’s faces.

The entire encampment was burning. And it wasn’t just broken Gollems littering the place either. There were fallen people all over the place.

The second Balmung landed, the Seekers dashed out to investigate. There was no immediate sign of any enemy activity. At first, I wondered if they’d fled, but it was more likely that they’d proceeded

deeper into the ruins. The entrance was fairly wide, and it led to a cavernous space... You'd be able to fit a lot of people and Golems down there.

"Pull it together, lad! Listen to me! Stay with me!"

I came to my senses when I heard Mario screaming as he shook a dying man in his arms.

Oh, crap. I can ponder later... Need to heal any survivors first.

I quickly cast **[Area Heal]**, targeting any injured or dying individual in the immediate vicinity. In a stroke of incredible luck, not a single person had died yet. The man Mario was shaking suddenly blinked in surprise as he stood up, fully healed.

"Was that...Healing magic? Yer insane..."

I shot an awkward smile at Mario and Ripple, who seemed utterly baffled by my spell. Then, I turned to question a young soldier.

"What happened here?"

"Huh? O-Oh, um...we were suddenly attacked, sir. By a strange group. I only saw one man...and he wore a funny mask... He had peculiar four-armed Golems that were all lanky and thin... There were dozens of them!"

"Funny masks?"

"Yes, sir. Covered their whole heads, they did. Long beaks on 'em, like crows..."

Crow-like beaked masks? Sounds kinda like plague doctor masks... That's certainly weird.

I looked closely at the wreckage around us and saw evidence of the four-armed Golems he described. They had round heads and capes on their backs, which kind of made them resemble scarecrows.

"So, where'd they go?"

“Into the ruins, I think...”

“Then they’re after Chrom’s ship... Damn it all! Who leaked?!”

I could feel Mario’s anger as he kicked a nearby crate. The Ark beneath these ruins was the legacy of the crown’s creator. It went without saying that any country would probably kill to have its power. There was always the chance this was some random bandit attack, but it felt much more like the doing of some organized force.

“The ship’s locked though, is it not? You need a crown to get in.”

“Use your head, mother. There’s no actual reason to walk in the conventional way. If you don’t fear a little collateral damage, you could easily break in elsewhere,” Quun said plainly in response to Leen.

That was definitely a possibility. I knew graverobbers and certain relic hunters had a habit of blowing stuff up and asking questions later. Though, there was no way of knowing if these people would be like that or not. Personally, I hoped that the creator of the crowns had a more sophisticated security system on his main production ship.

“Then they might destroy it?! Unacceptable! That Ark’s a treasure trove of ancient tech, I say! We’re gonna get those bastards and show ’em what for!”

Both the Seekers and the Gandhilis knights raised their fists in agreement upon hearing Mario’s rousing words.

...Your Golems are still broken, you know? What’re you gonna do?

“Hrm. I’d really prefer there to be no damage done to any valuable data. I’m of the opinion that we should hurry.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

I definitely agreed with Doc Babylon on that front. I didn’t want these attackers recklessly trashing vital information.

Mario's men charged on ahead into the ruins, and we followed after. Apparently, the ruin was made up of seven underground levels and the dock with the ship was at the lowest point. The structure was surprisingly complex, so Ripple opened up a map for us to inspect.

"Right about here... I think this'd be the fastest route. Without a map, the trespassers ain't gonna get too far."

The map reminded me of a subway back on Earth. The area was pretty intricately designed. I'd definitely have gotten lost without it.

"Master. Requesting permission to interject."

"Hm? What do you mean, Albus?" Yumina asked with a raised brow.

Albus took the map from Ripple and pointed a small mechanical finger at a point on the top floor.

Huh? There's nothing marked there...

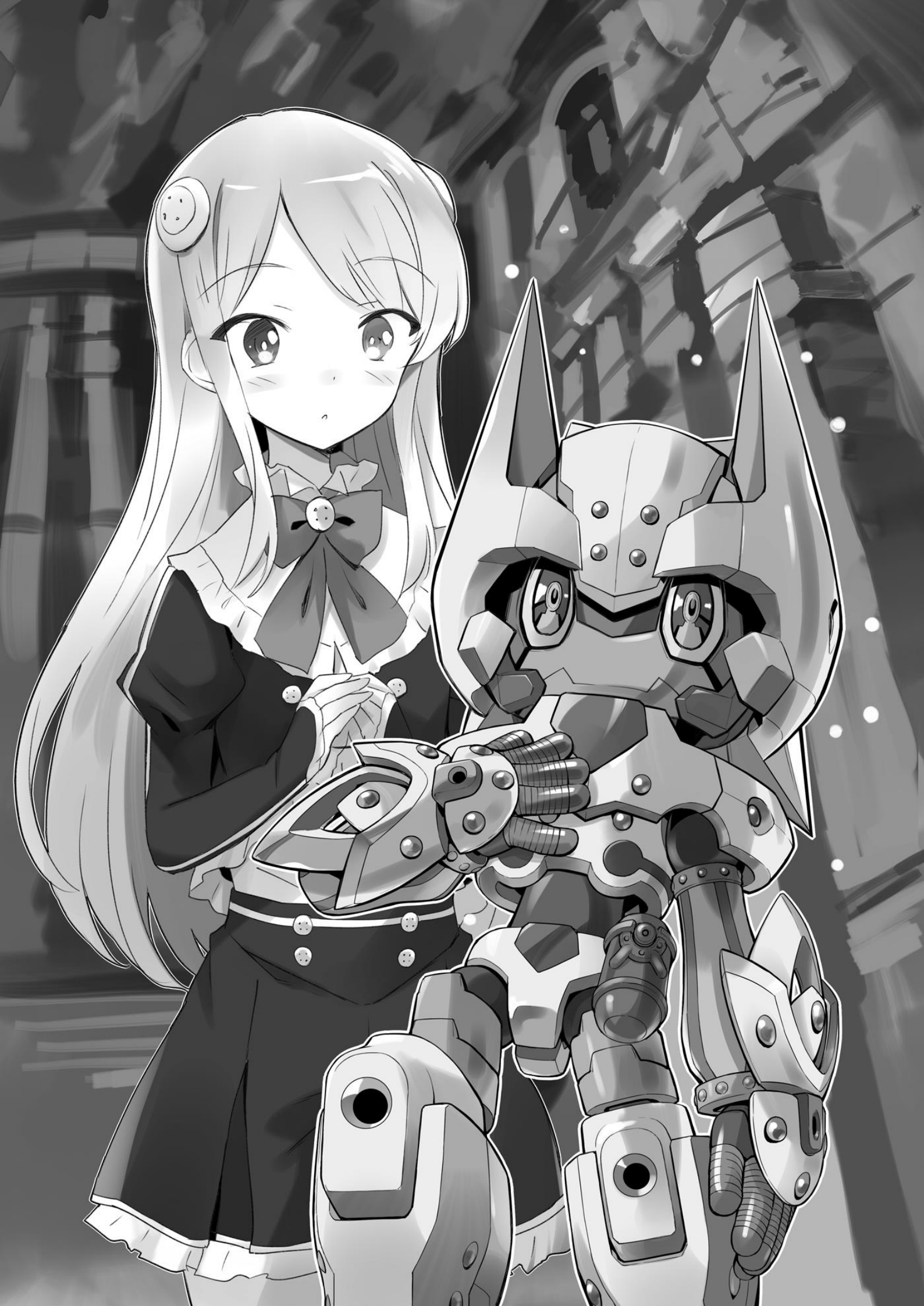
"This area holds a private elevator that leads directly to the bottom floor."

"Whaaat?! How'd you figure that out?!"

"This site was created by Chrom Ranchesse to act as a hideout. I have been here before."

That made sense. It was only natural that Albus would know about it, being one of Chrom's creations and all. But if that was the case, why hadn't Albus told us about the Ark existing sooner?

"The High Master instilled several secretive directives within the crown series. We are not permitted to speak of them. This goes for all crown models."



“Huh, I see... That Chrom Ranchesse fellow certainly is secretive, isn’t he?”

“Can’t blame him for that, Yumina. People with top-tier tech often get no end of hassle from people who want to steal from them. It’s understandable why he’d wanna hide, yeah? I mean, I hid Babylon for the exact same reason,” Doc Babylon said as she nodded her head slowly.

I could understand that. If I remembered right, royals of the past had often demanded she hand over Babylon, Cesca, and the other Babylon Gynoids.

“All right, let’s hurry along, then.”

We all headed over to the place Albus pointed out on the map. At first glance, it seemed to be nothing more than a plain white wall. But then, I noticed a little spellstone in an alcove. I channeled my magic through it, and part of the wall split open and pulled apart like elevator doors.

There wasn’t enough space in the elevator for all of us to cram in, so once I and the others from Brunhild got in, Mario, Ripple, some of the Seekers, and a few Gandhilis knights squeezed between us. Then, we headed straight down to the dock level.

The doors closed and the box we were in began its descent. There was nothing inside the box, but I couldn’t help but look around for some kind of electronic display showing the floor number... Seemed I was too used to Earth elevators.

Eventually, a small ding resounded and the doors opened wide...revealing a group of several lanky, four-armed Gollems that were scuttling around in the darkness.

“I-It’s them! Those are the Golems that attacked us!” one of the knights in the elevator exclaimed.

“VWEEEP. VWOORP!”

One of the four-armed Golems charged at us, leaping around like a monkey. I calmly pulled Brunhild from my waist, shooting it square in the chest. The gunshot rang out and a tiny whirlwind appeared where the bullet struck the Golem, ripping it apart. My bullets were currently infused with the Wind spell, **[Spiral Lance]**.

“Don’t just stand there, lads! Trash them!”

“Aye aye!”

At Mario’s command, a group of Seekers charged out of the elevator. They weren’t just engineers, but famed explorers as well. It was only natural that they were used to a little rough and tumble. They stampeded toward the four-armed Golems, wrenches and hammers in hand.

The knights we’d brought with us also stepped out of the elevator, running after them.

“VWEEEP!”

I quickly transformed Brunhild into blade mode, joining the scuffle between man and machine. The space was a little too narrow to be shooting, and I didn’t want to risk friendly fire.

Quun, on the other hand, pulled out her spellcaster gun and started aiming down the sights. A bolt of lightning spewed from the barrel, jumping from enemy to enemy.

That thing’s pretty good... I should make one for myself.

“Hrkh!”

“Gah!”

A few of our allies were blasted back by the four-armed Golems. They had a surprising amount of power, given how slim and lanky they were.

“Man, this is taking way too long. [Slip]!”

“VWEEEP?!”

The four-armed Golems started sliding and falling all over the place, allowing the old dudes to bash them to bits with hammers until they stopped moving.

“What are these things? They don’t look like legacy models.”

“Their base bodies are similar to Golems I’ve seen in Isengard.”

“But the arms and legs’re more like Gardio ones...”

The Seekers started poking at the fallen Golems, trying to ascertain their origins. I personally thought we could save that for later, however.

“Dead ahead. The dock is approximately one hundred meters in that direction.”

“Got it. Let’s roll.”

We left some of the old men behind and followed Albus. Our group turned at the end of the hall, then walked down a dimly lit corridor and headed down some more stairs. Eventually, we came out into a broad area, which was some kind of underground lake. The ship was floating atop it.

It was massive. Bigger than I’d assumed, really. No matter how you looked at it, it was more like a spaceship than any seafaring vessel I’d ever seen. It had no sails, and there was some kind of huge engine-like thing affixed to the hull.

“...This thing doesn’t fly, does it?”

“Negative. The Ark is a non-aerial vehicle. It is a submersible aquatic vehicle.”

Oh, damn... So it's a submarine?! Guess it does kinda look like one, now I think about it... But isn't it too big?

“Hmph... T’would seem we have uninvited guests. Gandhilese dogs are most persistent, aren’t they?”

I was snapped out of my surprise by a sudden voice. Then, I turned to see a figure blocking our path, as if preventing us from reaching the Ark. He wore black, rounded sunglasses that looked more like goggles. They were affixed to a metal plague mask with a long, curved beak that had steel rivets fitted up the side. His coat was long, black, and flowing, complete with a hood pulled over his head. He also had something that looked like a spray can about his waist, as well as a thin red rapier at his side. Plus, there was some kind of peculiar mechanical rucksack on his back, attached to some strange dial on his belt.

Frankly, he seemed more like a retro steampunk cosplayer than anything else...but something felt seriously off with him. Whatever the case, I had no idea who this guy was.

“Who are you? A bandit looking for an easy score? Some shadow operative for another country?”

“Neither, my friend, for I am a mere devout. A follower of the wicked god, one might say.”

“...What?”

The plague-masked man ignored my concerned reaction and casually tossed the spray can at his waist at me. It rolled toward us, spewing noxious-looking smoke from inside.

What the—?! Poison?!

“[Prison]!”

I quickly set up a protective ward, saving everyone around me from the poison. However, the green smoke quickly filled our vision and obscured the enemy's form.

"I'll be off, then."

In the smoky haze, I saw wing-like attachments pop out of the man's backpack that propelled him high into the air. I'd never seen anything like it! I could just barely make him out as he flew over to the Ark and landed atop its hull... And then, the smoke completely overtook my vision, blocking me from seeing anything more.

Dammit! What's going on?!

"Spiral forth, O Wind! Raging Sweeping Gale: [Cyclone Storm]!"

Leen exclaimed, conjuring up winds to blow the gas away, which knocked the can itself into the nearby waters in the process.

With our vision finally clear, we were greeted by naught but the sight of the calm, underground lake.

The Ark was gone. It had vanished without a trace.

◇ ◇ ◇

"The ship's...gone?"

The massive Ark in front of us had vanished in the blink of an eye. It might not have been an appropriate thought, but I couldn't help but be reminded of a magic show... You know, the kind where it'd be all like "Now you see me, now you don't!" or something along those lines.

"It didn't dive into the lake, did it?"

"No, it vanished far too quickly for that. Plus, the surface of the water is completely still," I said, shooting down Yumina's suggestion.

It's probably some kinda teleportation magic... Though it might still be there? Maybe it's just hidden by illusion magic.

I flew over to the dock to make sure it was actually gone. It was.

“Let’s see... Run search... Ark. Searching... No Ark found.”

Not even my **[Search]** spell managed to locate it, which meant there must’ve been some kind of ward up. I could’ve always channeled my divinity into the **[Search]** spell, allowing me to bypass such contrivances...but that would take me channeling my divinity outward over the entire search radius. Therefore, it would only really work if I was looking for things in my immediate vicinity, not the whole world.

“That masked fellow... His words were somewhat troubling, were they not?”

“...Yeah. He mentioned the wicked god.”

Leen’s question made me nod along with her. The masked guy had said something extremely suspect. But was the wicked god he was alluding to the same one as the NEET I’d defeated? Or was it something else entirely? Wicked gods could be born from corrupted divinity, usually from sacred treasure... All they required were enough malice and the right vessel to take on a will of their own.

As far as I knew, the only sacred treasure on this planet was my smartphone. Those twin blades that Ende had were in my **[Storage]**, so it couldn’t be them either. I took my smartphone out of my pocket and slowly looked it over.

Seems fine to me?

“The wicked devout... Wasn’t that one of the things Granny Tokie was concerned about? It must mean that— BWUFGH?!”

“Shhh!”

Hm?

I raised a brow and saw Arcia flailing around, her mouth firmly covered by Quun's hands. Something told me that one of my daughters was speaking out of turn.



I stared at Quun, but she simply shrugged her shoulders innocently in response.

Gimme a break... You can't act like that and just start whistling the situation away.

"...Quun. Do you know anything about this?"

"Not at all, father. We don't know a thing," my daughter said as she smiled innocently, gazing back at me with innocent eyes. She was just as good as her mother when it came to playing the fool, apparently.

"You sure about that? I might have to ban you from Babylon..."

"W-Wait, father! Please don't do that! That's no fair!"

Heh... Ye of simple mind... Now I know how to get what I want out of you! W-Wait, Leen... Don't give me that look!

"Ugh... Think about our company? Can we talk about it later, please?"

"Fine. But let your sister breathe, okay? She's going red in the face."

"Mfh!" Arcia, freed from her sister's grabby confines, took a deep breath.

Quun had a point. It would've been unwise to get into matters concerning Tokie when we had the Seekers around. I'd just have to probe for more info once I got home.

"Hm... So what now... Was the Ark really stolen?"

"Seems like it. Teleportation magic of some kind's my best bet," I flatly stated. I had no other response for Mario's question.

He seemed pretty dejected by my words. And the knights of Gandhilis looked similarly dismayed. It was no wonder, really. They'd

let the legacy of an ancient genius slip right through their fingers... It was a considerable loss for their country.

“Hey, Mr. Mario... What was with those four-armed Golems?”

“Beats me, friend. They’re pretty sophisticated stuff. Hybrid models made outta different pieces are rare. Normally, hybrids like them wouldn’t even be able to move, so their creator’s gotta be some kinda crazy genius. If that’s the kinda person who took the Ark from us, well... Tch, we’re probably screwed.”

I quietly pondered to myself as I heard Mario talking with one of the knights. Those four-armed Golems definitely didn’t seem run of the mill...which made his words all the more concerning. If hybrids like that truly required a sophisticated creator, then we were definitely up against someone who knew their stuff.

Yumina turned to Albus and asked, “Albus... What exactly can the Ark do? What is its purpose?”

“The Ark was Chrom Ranche’s personal production factory. When provided with raw materials, it is capable of mass production on an industrial level.”

“Wait...mass production of what?! Crowns?!”

Albus’s answer startled the hell out of me... It was bad enough with a handful of crown Golems, but an army? That’d be a nightmare.

“Negative. Crowns cannot be mass-produced.”

“Don’t scare me by being all vague, then...”

Once I calmed down, I realized that if it was that easy to make crowns, then there’d probably be a lot more around... If it was his personal factory, he’d probably have made dozens of them with it.

“It’s still a factory facility that belonged to one of the greatest golemancers in history. It stands to reason that it would contain secrets beyond standard facilities.”

Elluka's right... If it falls into the hands of someone dangerous, we'd be in some serious trouble. Wait...what am I saying? That guy was talking about a wicked god. It's already in the hands of someone dangerous!

"We crowns act as keys to the Ark. It can only function with our direct input."

"Huh, really? So their next target might be a crown Golem..."

If they wanted the Ark for its capabilities, then that was their only option... Fortunately for me, four crowns happened to be in Brunhild. Well, technically, there were only three functional crowns. Luna's one had been stripped of its abilities. There was always the chance they'd turn their eyes toward another crown, however.

"Negative. The safest conclusion would be that the assailants already have a crown."

"...What?"

Just as I was thinking of ways to safeguard the blue and green crowns, Albus took me completely by surprise.

When I asked the little Golem to elaborate, he simply pointed to the passageway we'd come through and said, "The door to that passageway will not open without a crown. We engaged enemy Golems the moment we came down the elevator. Conclusion: The enemy brought a crown with them."

"H-Hold up...how many crowns are there, again?"

"Red. Blue. Green. Purple. Black. White. Six in total."

Of the six Albus listed, four were already in Brunhild. And that meant the blue or green crown was in the enemy's hands!

"This unit surmises you have come to an erroneous conclusion. But it is not your fault, as you were unaware of the two unfinished crowns

created by Chrom Ranchesse during his ordeal between the two worlds. The gold and silver crowns.”

“Gold and silver...? They sound kinda fancy...”

From what I recalled, Chrom Ranchesse used the power of the black and white crowns to jump between the Reverse World and the world I was more acquainted with. And according to Albus, upon discovering the Phrase invasion, Chrom started creating the gold and silver crowns as a way to get back to his original world without having to pay the toll for his contract... Unfortunately, he didn’t finish them in time. That left the gold and silver crowns in a dormant, unfinished state, which meant the masked guy must’ve gotten his hands on one of them before he’d arrived.

...This just feels weird, though. Like, isn’t their plan really developed? Did he get the crown first because he wanted the Ark? Or did he target the Ark because he got the crown? Wait, how’d he even learn about the Ark?

“We should inform the king of Gandhilis about this at once. Grand Duke, would you mind coming with me? I don’t really know how to explain all this...”

“No problem. It only makes sense to introduce myself while I’m here.”

I’d been looking for an opportunity to meet the king of Gandhilis, so I decided to make the most of our visit.

A handful of knights went with the Seekers to board their airship, while the rest of them stayed behind at the camp. Meanwhile, me and the Brunhild lot boarded the Balmung.

Thankfully, we didn’t have to cover much distance between the ruins and the capital of Gandhilis. We moved through the air at a relatively slow speed, letting the Seekers take the lead. We figured it’d be

better if they entered the airspace first, rather than letting the sight of the Balmung freak out the general populace.

Once I was alone with my family and the Babylon group, I had questions.

“So...I need answers here. What was that guy talking about with that wicked god stuff?” I narrowed my eyes at Arcia and Quun, who were sitting across the table from me, as I asked that question. Though honestly, they didn’t seem to be taking the situation all that seriously.

“We don’t really know much ourselves, to be honest. But what we do know is that the wicked devout are vestiges of the wicked god that you once killed.”

“Uh...vestiges? What do you mean?”

“They’re like residue, father. Think of them as leftover soybean byproducts. When soy milk coagulates into tofu, there’s some goopy runoff that tends to get squeezed out and left by the wayside. That’s what they are,” Arcia said, explaining things in cooking terms, which sort of helped.

So they’re like squeezed out bits from that NEET? That’s kinda gross...

“So you’re saying he’s something similar to the wicked god?”

“Not just him, father. There are several. It’d be more apt to say ‘them,’” Quun stated before letting out a small chuckle.

“Granny Tokie didn’t exactly tell us much about them, but she said they’d pose a threat if they emerged. If they don’t do anything, we’ll be able to return to our time without a hitch... But if they start causing chaos, then their residual divinity will complicate the timestream, making the future somewhat less certain.”

“But the wicked devout weren’t supposed to wake up... She only really told us to be on the safe side. We weren’t even supposed to tell you about it, since it wasn’t meant to be relevant at all.”

Wait, so these things might actually change the future? Maybe not to an extreme amount, but it’d be bad if my kids can’t get back home... I don’t want them creating some kind of alternate timeline that messes everything up.

“I can’t say I understand what it is they want, but they certainly seem unpleasant,” Leen said, failing to hold back her urge to sigh.

“They’re just residue, right? Can’t be that bad...”

“That’s a touch overoptimistic, father. Even runoff can become part of a good meal if used appropriately. The wicked god may have been the finished tofu, but the wicked devout still came from the same soybeans. There’s no hierarchy there, only a difference in form and refinement.” Arcia proudly spoke in metaphors again, but I couldn’t help but feel she was stretching it a little too far. I still got the gist, however. Essentially, we needed to tread carefully.

Even if these things were false gods, they still had smidgens of muddled divinity. That meant they could spread that divinity to mortals to create dependents. I wondered if the plague mask guy had once been human... Either way, he was one of the devout now. Whether he was that sludge made manifest or a person corrupted by it didn’t really matter.

“So, uh, what do they want? Revenge? Resurrection of the original?”

“Well...it’s not really known, I think. I’m sure it’s bad news, though.”

I didn’t think it was possible to resurrect the wicked god, since its soul had been scattered into oblivion upon defeat. At the very least, that NEET bastard was never coming back. But there was always the possibility of a new wicked god rising out of all this. It’d need some kind of divine vessel to grow within, but...

Whatever the case, all I could really do was shrug. Would've been bad if that NEET god had ended up leaving some kind of sacred treasure behind...but surely that couldn't have happened.

"We're at the capital," Doc Babylon said, her voice echoing out from the bridge speakers. We glanced out the window to look at our surroundings.

The city was surrounded by towering, rocky spires. A river ran through the settlement, dividing it into north and south. The large, sturdy castle sat on the north side. To the east of the castle sat an open field with an airship parked in it, likely an official Gandhilis vessel. I noticed that the Seekers were descending close to it, so they probably wanted us to follow suit. It must have been a designated landing zone. Unfortunately, there wasn't really enough space for Balmung.

"Sorry, guys... Would you mind waiting up in the sky? I won't be long."

"Not a problem. We're in the middle of taking a Gollem apart, so no rush."

I had a feeling the Gollem they were referring to was one of the four-armed ones from the ruins. They certainly wasted no time in trying to rip it apart. Quun, having heard the announcement, suddenly jumped for joy. Sparkles flared up in her eyes.

"Can I assist them, father?!"

"Yep, yep. You can stay behind too."

"Yay! I knew you'd understand!" Quun exclaimed loudly as she jumped about. Somehow, I'd grown used to her antics already.

Don't despair about our daughter, Leen... I assure you I feel the same way.

"As for Arcia..."

“I’ll be staying behind as well. Fear not, father. I’ll prepare some food in the meantime. B-But I’d appreciate it if you could bring some ingredients back.”

Hold up...didn't I already eat a home-cooked lunch from you on the way here?

I didn’t want to outright reject her or hurt her feelings, so I figured I’d just try to be as hungry as possible by the next time I saw her.

I looked out the window and saw both Mario and Ripple descend from their airship, so I used **[Teleport]** to go down to them. In the end, Yumina, Lu, and Leen were the ones to join me.

“Welcome to Gandhilis. Step this way to see the king.”

I looked over to see a young steward. He’d been talking to a knight, but his attention promptly switched over to us.

We followed him, eventually coming to a fairly secluded room. Once we entered, we found ourselves face to face with three individuals. Though they looked to be of high standing, they didn’t appear pretentious or tacky at all.

The first was Princess Cordelia Terra Gandhilis, the second princess of the realm. The bespectacled maid behind her was Parullel. She happened to be the daughter of both Mario and Ripple. I’d met the two of them after the masquerade incident in Refreese. Since it’d been a while, we exchanged a brief greeting.

That left the third and final person in the room. He stood up from his desk and walked over to us. He had a big bushy beard, which was white due to his age. His body was sturdy as a tree trunk.

“Welcome to Gandhilis, Grand Duke of Brunhild. I am the king, Galivan Zila Gandhilis.”

“It’s an honor to meet you, and pardon my sudden intrusion. I’m the grand duke of Brunhild, Mochizuki Touya. I’m accompanied today by three of my wives, Yumina, Lucia, and Leen.”

“Ah, I was wondering who these pleasant young ladies were. Please, be at ease.”

King Gandhilis offered us chairs, which we readily sat down upon. A short while later, Mario began to explain the situation.

“Your Majesty, I gotta apologize. We lost the ship we were studying.”

“I’d say the fault lies with me and my lax allocation of resources. It’s a true pity we were unable to obtain any new information relating to Chrom Ranchesse, but more than anything, I’m just pleased you’re all alive.”

Though Mario bowed his head in shame, King Gandhilis simply smiled gently and shook his own head. It was a plain relief to see that he was a kindhearted man.

“Now, Grand Duke...do we have any idea where this assailant may have escaped to?”

“I don’t. They used some advanced teleportation spell to escape and employed similar techniques to cloak their location. Whoever they are, they know what they’re doing.”

“Hrm... Then there’s nothing to be done, is there?” King Gandhilis said, then folded his arms and let out a small, tired sigh.

I could see Princess Cordelia fidgeting slightly in my peripheral vision.

What’s she doing?

“U-Uh...! If anything comes up then, please, uh... You could contact us? Directly!”

“Oh, sure. No problem.”

“Right, so uh... Uhhh...”

Is she okay? Does she wanna say something?

I briefly exchanged glances with Yumina, but she looked just as befuddled as me.

After a few moments, Parullel let out a sigh and frankly stated, “What my lady is attempting to do, Grand Duke, is bait you into giving her one of those smartphone devices so that she might engage in lovey-dovey conversations with her beloved Emperor Gardio once the sun goes down.”

“D-Don’t put it like that!”

Cordelia was close to weeping out of embarrassment. Parullel reminded me of Cesca in quite a few ways. Though they differed in that Cesca was a clear masochist, while Parullel struck me as more of a sadist. Either way, they were a pair of intrusive maids.

“I-It’s that little communication device, yes? I know that the rulers of Gardio and Allent both have one, so...could I trouble you for one as well, perhaps?”

All you had to do was ask. I was gonna give you one anyway.

I opened up **[Storage]** and pulled out a pair of smartphones. I then slid them across the table, along with a small instruction booklet.

As I was showing King Gandhilis and his daughter how to use their new devices, I caught the burning gaze of Mario, Ripple, and Parullel from across the table. They weren’t exactly being subtle...but I figured it was fine, since Yumina’s eye had already vetted them for potential ill will, and they’d come up clean.

“No taking it apart, all right? You won’t be able to put it back together, and I won’t give you a new one.”

I had to make sure to remind Mario not to mess with the technology, since I knew exactly what he was thinking. The mass-produced smartphones were enchanted with both **[Shield]** and **[Protection]**, so

they couldn't be broken very easily. That didn't mean they were impossible to take apart, however. I just wanted everyone in the room to understand that doing so would mean you'd probably never get the chance to do it again.

Princess Cordelia immediately asked me for the emperor of Gardio's number. I didn't want to just hand the guy's number off without his consent, so I sent him a text asking if that was okay.

He sent me a message back, almost immediately, saying "Absolutely!" and that was that.

But even though Princess Cordelia had his number, she was suddenly hesitant to actually call him. Probably because all eyes were now fixed on her as she held the phone in her hands.

"I-I can't call him when you're all staring at me like that!"

Her feelings seemed reasonable enough to me.



Chapter II: My Darling Diva Daughter

The meeting with King Gandhilis went well enough that he agreed to attend the next meeting of the allied nations.

Even though the Phrase and the mutants were long gone, it was still important to keep having international conferences. If anything, it was more important than ever, since we wanted to bridge the cultural divide between the eastern and western continents.

We needed to ensure that the countries on the eastern continent familiarized themselves with Gollems and magical technology, while at the same time getting the countries of the western continent more familiar with general magic. To do that, the heads of state all needed to come to a mutual understanding.

As an example of broadening this kind of cultural awareness, I did a magical aptitude test on King Gandhilis and Princess Cordelia. Maybe it was because they were from a mining nation, but they both had the potential for Earth magic within them. After a little guidance from Leen, they managed to cast an elementary spell called **[Stone Bullet]**. Earth magic was fairly simplistic, but it had a lot of practical applications when it came to stuff like mining.

I gave them a beginner's manual for Earth magic, and everything went pretty smoothly as far as first international meetings could go. If only it were always so simple...

Usually, I ended up getting caught up in weird situations where I had to solve problems for the countries before they'd talk to me...

Though honestly, you could probably consider the whole Ark thing a weird enough situation on its own.

The wicked devout... Whoever or whatever they were, I wasn't about to let them bring chaos to this fledgling world. Not when peace was right on our doorstep.

After saying our goodbyes to the royals of Gandhilis, we headed back to Balmung and made preparations to return to Brunhild. I could've simply used [Gate] to go back, but Arcia wanted to cook for us.

"Look, father! Look! Eat up!"

"R-Right, I get it! I'll eat!"

The Balmung dining room was filled to the brim with food.

There's way too much here... She made enough for a goddamn imperial feast... I can't eat this, not on my own... Why didn't I bring Yae?! This is what she does best!

"Oh my, this is delicious. What do you call it, Arcia?"

"That's apple and cheese wrapped in prosciutto, Mother Leen. The ham itself is from a Bloodboar."

Wait, Bloodboars are those giant white pigs you find in snowy places... Never realized they tasted this good...

Lu chomped down a mouthful of our daughter's cooking.

"Interesting... The sweet-and-sour elements of the apple mix very well with the saltiness from the ham... I'm very impressed."

"Oh? I never thought you'd praise me so highly, mother. How kind of you," Arcia said with a smug look on her face, as if to quietly communicate her personal feelings of victory.

Please don't put me in a tough spot again...

"However...if I were you, I'd add lemon juice or black pepper as the final accent. It falls just short of perfection, I'm afraid."

"Urgh! O-Obviously I knew that!"

Welp, looks like Lu struck right back... She's got a real smug look on her face now too... You really are mother and daughter, you know that?

There was too much food in front of me. Enough to overwhelm my sense of sight and smell, let alone taste. I attempted to take a little respite from the feast, turning to Arcia with a burning question.

“Where’s Quun?”

“She’s in the ship’s hangar with the other two, taking apart the Gollem they recovered. I tried calling them in, but they didn’t really reply...”

Ugh... Once they’re focused on something, they just won’t quit. Get in here and help me, guys... Please... There’s way too much here for me to eat on my own! Wait, I can just go grab them. Yeah, I’m not fleeing the feast! I’ll come back!

I walked into the hangar and saw Doc Babylon, Elluka, and Quun all sitting on the floor, staring at something. They had frustrated looks on their faces. Dismembered and discarded Gollem parts were strewn about the room, apparently exhausted of any possible intel.

I peeked over at what they were all staring at. It was a red octahedron about the size of a baseball.

“What’s this?”

“The G-Cube we recovered from the Gollem... It’s clearly an operational power source, but it’s different from a normal Gollem’s composition.”

“Different how?”

“Most of the parts are from standard combat Gollems...but the Q-Crystal is from a солдат.”

I didn’t really understand what they were getting at. What made it so different from a normal modded Gollem?

“It’s a Gollem, yet at the same time...it’s not. An unknown entity created by combining factors that shouldn’t be combined.”

“And look at this red thing! It functions like a G-Cube, that much I’ve surmised...but it’s a complete enigma. Not even my **[Analyze]** works on it.”

Doc Babylon held up the octahedron to the light. It was a bloodred, translucent gem, as far as I could tell. Still, the fact that **[Analyze]** hadn’t worked on it was concerning...

Let me try my divine sight... Oh... Now that’s interesting.

“Don’t handle that without protection. There are traces of the wicked god’s divinity leaking out of it. It’s nothing too dangerous, but it might make you ill.”

Doc Babylon immediately dropped the octahedron, letting it fall to the hangar floor with a clatter.

“The wicked god? Didn’t you kill that?”

“Yeah, I did. But apparently there’s some residue left or something.”

Both Elluka and Doc Babylon raised their eyebrows at that, turning to me and asking about the residue in unison.

I didn’t fully understand it, so I simply repeated Arcia’s analogy about the tofu dregs.

“I see... Well, that certainly explains it. Residue’s a rather fitting term.”

“Even if it’s just pulp, it’s true that it comes from the same source as the wicked god itself... We can’t afford to take any chances.”

NEET god or not, the power of a god was still beyond mortal comprehension. Regular human beings couldn’t do a thing in the face of such power. And this world had been abandoned by the gods, which meant its protection rested solely on my shoulders.

Though saying it had been abandoned by the gods wasn’t quite accurate. After all, I was technically a god, and I was this place’s

caretaker now. I sure didn't know where to begin when it came to world management, however.

I was still a rookie in the god business, so I could only hope that my seniors would give me a little help. But I knew I wouldn't get much help from Karen or Moroha, so I figured I had to turn to someone higher up the totem pole. The only two I could really think of were God Almighty himself or Granny Tokie. Unfortunately, Granny Tokie had been pretty damn busy lately, so I'd seen neither hide nor hair of her. Given how busy she was with the timequake and my kids coming through, I felt the need to not burden her further. And with that in mind, I decided to go straight to the top...to God Almighty. It'd just be a matter of paying him a visit and getting some answers.

"Even if this is the work of a wicked god, an engineer still had to have put this patchwork Gollem together."

"I'd usually only expect this kind of work from the five great gollemancers...but the Professor is still in Panaches, and the Maestro is a misanthrope...so I doubt they had anything to do with it."

The five great gollemancers, huh...? That's those two, then Elluka, then the Seekers...so it can't be any of those guys.

The other one was the witch-king of Isengard, who was dead.

"From what I understand, the wicked devout are something of an organization. You might even call them a cult. With that in mind, would it be too unreasonable for them to induct an impressionable genius into their ranks?"

Ugh... I don't like the sound of that.

I couldn't help but grumble upon hearing Quun's suggestion. These people might have been worshipers of the wicked god who just got taken over...or they could've just been regular people being manipulated by something the wicked god ended up leaving behind.

“We don’t have much intel, so it’s pointless to speculate. If they’re planning to mess things up, I’ll just mess them up first.”

“Heh heh heh... That’s our father for you...”

“That’s all I have to say about this right now. So, let’s go eat, okay? Arcia’s been waiting for you.”

I made the three technologists get up, then followed them until I saw them enter the dining area. After that, I picked up the red octahedron, sealed it away with **[Prison]**, and tossed it into **[Storage]**.

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“Aww! If I knew it was gonna get that exciting, I would’ve gone with you!” Frei grumbled a bit as she slapped her palms on the table.

Come on, now... No need to misbehave.

“The wicked devout, huh? I wanna fight them!”

“I don’t think we have to do that...”

Linne was all amped up to go to war, while Elna was coming off as a lot calmer. I personally felt Elna was in the right.

“Don’t do anything reckless, okay? Especially not without our permission,” Elze said, and she narrowed her eyes slightly at Frei, who had a habit of running wild. Frei seemed to get the message right away, but Linne didn’t seem all that happy to hear it.

“Let’s just table this discussion for now, okay? Like Elze said, don’t do anything reckless.”

“Okaaaaaay...” Linne grumbled quietly, but still nodded her head. Quun, Frei, and Arcia all gave obedient little nods as well.

“Now, everyone. It’s time to take a bath and get ready for bed. Come along!”

“Okaaay!”

Yumina smiled before leading the girls off to the bath. She seemed more like a schoolteacher than a mother. Our bath was massive, big enough for us all to soak in the tub at the same time, even. Linze said she didn’t feel confident enough in Linne’s swimming, though.

Now that the kids are gone, I can head up to the divine realm and see what’s what. Oh, better not forget my offering...

God Almighty was a fan of traditional Japanese confectionery, so I’d made some dorayaki and yokan for him.

I opened up a **[Gate]** to that ever-familiar cloudy expanse. I’d expected to spend some alone time with God Almighty...but I was surprised to see another god sitting on the other side.

“Long time no see, kiddo.”

“Oh, hello there. You’re looking well.”

They greeted me, but I only had questions. Just what business did the god of destruction have here? Although, he was a god, so he had every right to hang around.

“Oh, before I forget... Brought you a little something. Dorayaki and yokan.”

“Oh, you need not have bothered, but thank you. Let us enjoy them at once.”

“Hey kid, want some booze?”

No thanks... Didn’t you drink a ton of it the last time you came down here? I remember being scared you’d destroy the world or something...

“What brings you here today, my boy?”

“Well, actually...” I began to explain the current situation to God Almighty. When I defeated the wicked god there, I became the

world's caretaker, so he no longer had omnipresent senses when it came to the events of my life.

I wasn't really sure I was worthy of the title, but I was still technically the god of that world... Newbie or not, its safety was my responsibility. That was why I had to know what a god should do under such circumstances.

"Ordinarily, I would say to let things play out...but the presence of the wicked god complicates matters. The way I see it, you have two options."

"And they are?"

"Option A would be to grant a divine weapon to a mortal in that world, allowing them to awaken as a hero. Then, it would be a simple matter of sitting back and letting them take charge of the situation. Normally, I would take that approach, but your situation is rather unique. You are not only the guardian of that world, but also a resident of it. Option B would be to handle it yourself. These residual dregs of malignant divinity, or even a new wicked god, should still pale in comparison to you."

Wait, really? Just like that?

"Wait, old man. There's option C! Just take everything in that world and—"

"Rejected."

"I didn't even get to finish!"

I had no interest in hearing out the god of destruction... It was pretty obvious he wanted to simply trash everything and be done with it.

Please don't treat the world I live in like some kinda disposable napkin...

"That world has been bequeathed to you. Whatever happens to it is solely up to you. Oh, though I would request that you refrain from

physically conquering the world. It may be your world, but that does not mean you can lay claim to the lives and lands within it. It belongs to the people of that world, first and foremost. It's simply your job to ensure that its inhabitants stay on a proper course, free from cosmic sway."

No plans on taking over the world here. Frankly, it'd be a massive pain in the ass.

Traditionally, gods were merely impartial observers of their worlds. They could occasionally nudge civilizations along the right path, but only in extreme situations did they make themselves known. They'd give out holy blades, choose oracles to speak for them, or even send angels or incarnations to spread the good word and save innocent souls.

It was a bit more complicated for me, though. I was technically still mortal, and I lived in the world I was in charge of.

"The wicked god's dregs and supporters should mean very little to you. Though I imagine it may be a troubling task... Please don't forget to completely excise the threat, however. If you leave anything behind, it'll simply regrow eventually."

"Ugh."

Why is this thing starting to feel more like weeding a garden? Guess I've gotta be thorough when pulling the roots...

"Oh yeah, will I need to warn the gods down there about this?"

The world wasn't just a place I managed, but also a resort of sorts for the divine.

Let's see... Putting Karen and the Brunhild gods aside... There's the goddess of dance, the god of strength, the god of industry, the god of glasses, the god of theater, the god of puppetry, the god of wandering, the goddess of flowers, and the goddess of gemstones down there.

“That will not be necessary. They are currently living as humans in that world, not the divine. They are on vacation, so there is no need to bother them.”

Guess that saves me some work. It's hard enough looking after the kids, so I'd rather not have my hands full with a bunch of gods too.

“It's not a huge deal, aye! Wicked god stains are the worst to scrub out when they spread across the lands... I usually find it easier to wreck the whole place instead of wasting my time huntin' the blobs down.”

Hell no, man... I know it'll be a hassle to clean up, but c'mon!

“At any rate, there is not a single thing explicitly forbidding you from directly interfering in this case, so feel free to treat it like pest control and handle the situation. Though be warned that if you fail, you will only invite further ruin for yourself down the line.”

“Ugh...”

Pest control... Well, I guess it makes sense. To the gods, dealing with this kind of thing probably isn't too dissimilar to scrubbing out a persistent stain or putting down rat traps. I'm sure it's work that most would rather not deal with.

Either way, I had God Almighty's approval, so I was clear to handle the issue however I felt like.

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“Dad, I wanna go hunt monsters!”

“Huh? Little strange to say that all of a sudden, isn't it?”

The next morning, when we were all having breakfast together, Linne suddenly blurted out an odd request.

“Fight monsters? Like...hunting?”

“Mhm! I can’t get any quests from the guild, and Brunhild doesn’t have very many strong beasts, so I’d like to take a trip to Mismede or the Sea of Trees!”

Though Linne was quite excited, Linze seemed rather troubled by the idea. I could understand to an extent... The little girl was talking about something quite dangerous as casually as one might plan out a picnic.

“Oh, I wanna go too. It’s been way too long since I killed some magical beasts. At this rate, I’m gonna get rusty,” Frei said and raised her hand, volunteering herself for the excursion.

Hrm... Kinda figured you’d keep her from acting all reckless, but you want in too? I thought as I turned to Quun.

“Do you kids do a lot of monster hunting in the future?”

“The environment’s a little different in this time period. There are more Behemoths in the future, which has led to mass migration of monsters and beasts across the world. Stampedes aren’t all that uncommon. Linne and Frei often accompany Yakumo on excursions across the world thanks to her **[Gate]** spell.”

That made sense. Behemoths had a habit of scaring the local population and driving them down into places where people lived whenever they appeared.

Come to think of it, Guildmaster Relisha had said something about a small uptick in the number of monster clashes lately. The increase in Behemoths was probably on account of the atmosphere having a higher magical concentration due to the two worlds merging. With all that in mind, it’d probably be better for the world overall if that excess of monsters was put down.

I turned back to Linze, offering her a sympathetic smile.

“What do you think?”

“I think Linne’s strong enough to hold her own unless she goes up against a particularly tricky foe... But if she’s outnumbered or facing something she’s unfamiliar with, she could still get hurt. So basically...I can’t let her do this on her own.”

“How about letting me go with her, then?” Karina, who strolled over to the table and picked up a piece of fruit, suddenly interjected.

“Hunting’s my forte, after all. I can teach her the best way to deal with any prey.”

...Hunting isn’t just your forte, you know? You’re literally the goddess of hunting...

A small show of hands determined that only Linne and Frei were keen to go hunting. Elna resisted the idea, albeit hesitantly, while Quun and Arcia seemed completely uninterested. Arcia did tell them to bring back some good meat, however.

Linne then brought up the fair point that we should invite Allis, since she’d probably be a bit upset if she learned she missed out.

Obviously I’d be joining them as well. I didn’t want my kids doing something completely ridiculous in foreign territory.

“So, Linne, what are we hunting?”

“Dragons!”

...Linne, sweetie? Dragons are kind of the family members of one of my summons... And Luli’s sitting right there... She’s literally staring at me right now... Don’t put me on the spot like this...

“But dad, isn’t it okay to hunt bad Dragons that break the rules? It’s fine to hunt subspecies that can’t think or talk too, right?”

“You sure seem well versed in Dragon hunting...”

She was right, yeah. There were some Dragons that were okay to hunt. The unthinking ones were little more than magical beasts at that level of intellect.

I called Luli over to hear her take on the situation.

"I think there are a fair few Dragons near a sanctuary in the Sea of Trees. Though if it's a real fight you want, I'd go for the Fiendrakes."

"The what?"

Fiendrakes were a subtype of Dragons. That wasn't fully accurate, actually... It was more like their evolution ran parallel to Dragon's. They were incredibly strong, but had no means of communicating. In basic terms, they were unintelligent creatures with all the might of a fully-fledged Dragon.

There were many different types of Fiendrakes too. Personally, I'd fought a poisonous one before, a Hydra. It was a horrible nine-headed beast that grew extra heads back each time it lost one. If it were just a matter of strength, that'd probably fit the bill for what Linne wanted... The only issue was that they tended to be pretty tricky creatures.

I took out my phone and ran a search for Fiendrakes. There were a surprisingly large number of results. Eventually, I settled on the best spot for hunting one.

"I say we go here...in the Sea of Trees. There's a small handful clumped together, and it's not far from this settlement either. We can get some hunting done and make the place safer at the same time."

I made a mental note to reach out to Pam, since she was in charge of stuff in the Sea of Trees. I didn't want to make a fuss or anything, so I figured it'd probably be better to visit her directly with a gift.

I looked over at Linne, who was absolutely raring to go. There was no way I could back out at this point. It would've been far easier if I'd simply said no...but I knew that the day would come when my kids had to return to the future. Thus, I wanted them to return home with fond memories of Brunhild and their family. Fond memories such as a day of hunting Fiendrakes together with their father.

"All right... Let's go."

"Yaaay!" Linne cheered loudly. Frei also seemed pretty excited. Hunting wasn't an awful hobby to have, and she probably helped out a lot of people whenever she did it... Still, part of me couldn't help but wish she was a little more feminine in places.

Either way, I finalized the necessary preparations before taking my kids off to slaughter Fiendrakes.

Guess this is one way to bond with your kids...

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It was one thing to talk about slaying Fiendrakes, but it wasn't supposed to be an easy feat. In some instances, portions of national armies had to be dedicated to taking out individual threats. They were more powerful than standard Dragon subspecies, they weren't capable of communicating, and they often came with unique abilities. The only saving grace was that they rarely came close to human settlements. But just because they didn't directly terrorize people didn't mean they weren't serious threats. Their presence often caused other magical beasts to stampede into civilized areas, and they could have adverse environmental effects. The Hydra I'd killed, for example, was letting out a toxic gas that affected nearby water sources.

At any rate, they were ferocious dragonic foes. They weren't the kind of enemy you'd face lightly... Or at least, they weren't supposed to be...

“Hey, I found that one first!”

“You snooze, you lose!”

“You two need to be a little more gentle. You’re going to damage their resource value.”

Allis and Linne were casually wiping out beast after beast as they walked through the dense woodland. Frei was casually pacing behind them, tossing any valuable corpses in her **[Storage]**. The mood definitely didn’t fit the image of a group going off to face down a ferocious Dragon...

We carried on through the dense jungle, straight on course toward the Fiendrake’s nest.

“Daaaaaaaad... Are we there yet?”

“Huh? It’s not much further. Just a bit past the upcoming river,” I said after checking our course on my phone. The news seemed to fill Linne with a little more energy.

Ende couldn’t help but sigh as he watched the kids bound along ahead of us.

“The kids sure are tough...”

“Keep it together, man. We’ve gotta set a good example.”

The kids with us were Frei, Linne, and Allis. The adults accompanying them were me, Ende, and Karina.



Linze, Hilde, Ney, Melle, and Lycee wanted to join us, but the first two had business to attend to, while Allis objected to her mothers accompanying us.

It wasn't that Allis had a problem with them or anything, but she apparently wasn't a fan of how overprotective they could be. It was clear from the outset that Ney and Melle wouldn't be able to help themselves if they saw their daughter facing a Fiendrake. They might even interfere and kill the Fiendrake themselves if they saw her in danger. I had a feeling Allis was trying to avoid that kind of outcome. She didn't even want Ende to tag along, but I had to ask him for permission to take her hunting. He was allowed to join us on the condition that he didn't interfere with the Fiendrake battle under any circumstances, and I was made to promise the same thing.

Of course, we both secretly agreed to step in if the kids faced any grave danger. After all, Ende had only promised not to interfere with Allis, and I'd only promised not to interfere with Frei and Linne... Nothing was stopping us from saving each other's children! Those poor, naive kids clearly didn't understand how sneaky grownups could be. Though technically, I wasn't a grownup... At least by Earth standards, anyway.

"BRAAARGH!" a massive boar roared as it suddenly charged out of the underbrush. It had sleek black fur and long, spear-like tusks. It was over three meters tall, and each time it turned or shook its head, it brought nearby trees crashing down. It honestly would've been more appropriate to call those tusks blades!

"Oh, it's a Bladeboar. If we go by guild terms, it'd be a red-tier monster," Ende casually explained what the creature was. I was thankful, since I'd never seen one before.

Red-tier implied it was the kind of monster you'd need a special listing for, the kind you'd need a veteran party to take down...yet the kids were casually playing rock, paper, scissors in front of it... Didn't they have more pressing matters to deal with?

"Woohoo! I win!" Allis cheered loudly as she pounded the air with her fist. The two losers grumbled a little before backing off.

Wait, they're doing a one-on-one?

"Bring it on!"

"GRAAARGH!" the Bladeboar roared once more before charging at Allis like a lance-wielding knight.

Allis didn't waver at the sight, simply bracing herself instead. The Bladeboar continued charging forward like an out-of-control car, so it was only a matter of time before it crashed...

"Prismatic Guillotine!"

A crystalline material suddenly emerged from Allis's right arm, taking on the form of a huge machete. She raised it high and swung it forward, slicing the Bladeboar clean in half as it charged headlong into the weapon's edge.

"Overkill..."

"...She's totally ruined the pelt."

Ende and Karina couldn't help but mutter. Allis was definitely a bit rough around the edges when it came to being a real hunter. She had the mindset that simply killing the monsters was more than enough.

"Hey, Frei, can you stash this for me? Arcy can cook it for us!"

"Sure thing, but...you've got blood all over you, Allis. Could you clean her up, father?" Frei casually shoved the Bladeboar into her **[Storage]** as she turned to me. She was right. Allis was basically

covered in the animal's blood, since splotches of the stuff were soaking through her clothes. It was a hell of a sight.

I quickly cast **[Clean]** on Allis, clearing away the blood and grime.

"If she's this tough, she'll make short work of the Fiendrake..."

"Don't underestimate them. A Dragon's still leagues beyond a beast, even when mindless. Plus, there are different kinds that have all manner of tricks up their sleeves," Karina replied. She had a point. That poisonous Hydra I'd fought was pretty damn tough. It was important not to let your guard down around them.

We eventually came to the edge of the river, so I opened up a **[Gate]** to get us to the other side. We then carried on straight ahead, and the jungle gradually gave way to a more barren, rocky environment. We were in some kind of rugged canyon.

Linne and the others clambered up over the uneven, rocky surface.

Don't go too far, now... Ah, wait...

"...You guys hear that?"

"I did. It's nearby."

I thought I faintly heard the roar of a Dragon off in the distance, so I checked with Ende. He'd heard it too. It was possible the enemy had already caught our scent. And so, I whipped out my smartphone and looked up the Fiendrake's location. It was headed right for us.

"Hold it, kids. The enemy's already on its way to our location. Let's move to a more open space so we can fight it better, okay?"

"Okay! Linne, Allis. Let's head that way. It'll provide a better vantage point."

"Got it."

"Okaaaaaay."

The two girls followed Frei's instructions and moved to a broad slope without much cluttering it. Linne and Allis then equipped their gauntlets, while Frei equipped a spear. They were ready to go.

"Don't forget that you guys are just here to watch! And go easy on the commentary too!"

"Yeah yeah, I know."

I'll switch from spectator to fighter if things get real bad, though...

Ende, Karina, and I sat ourselves down on a nearby rock.

Man...I kinda feel like a parent watching his kids on sports day. Oh, actually, I'll record a video to show everyone else later.

As I moved to get my smartphone, Ende did the same thing. Apparently, we'd arrived at the same conclusion.

"Oh, I think it's here," I remarked as I heard the sound of flapping wings in the distance. The sound grew louder until I could see the form of a Dragon in the sky.

It was jet black and fairly large. It had four legs, while leathery, bat-like wings jutted out from its back. Huge horns adorned its head, while a red fin ran down its back all the way to the end of its tail. Its tail was jagged with a spiny flail instead of a tip, which kind of made it resemble a cocklebur. Its eyes were bloodshot red, so there wasn't much in the way of friendliness radiating off them. I got the vibe that it was hellbent on wiping out these two-legged intruders who'd wandered in on its territory. Couldn't blame it, really.

"Never seen that kind of Dragon before... It's gotta be a Fiendrake, though...right?"

"It's a Nidhogg. A rare kind of man-eating Dragon that feasts on human corpses," Karina quickly answered my question.

A Nidhogg, huh...? And it's a man eater? Kinda scary.

“GROAAARGH!” the Nidhogg let out a tremendous roar. To my ears, it sounded more like a joyful exclamation than anything hostile. It seemed more excited about finding new prey than anything else.

“All right, let’s do this!” Frei exclaimed as she twirled a spear that was longer than her own body, then lobbed it straight into the sky at the Nidhogg. The spear went hurtling through the air, but the Nidhogg deftly avoided it.

“Too easy,” Frei said, then grinned and waved her hand, causing the spear to stop and double back. I hadn’t noticed at first, but the spear was actually pointed at both ends. It came hurtling backward at an incredible speed, shredding through both of the Nidhogg’s wings.

“GKHACKH?!”

“Nice!”

With its leathery wing membrane torn, the Nidhogg lost its balance mid-flight. As that happened, Linne cast **[Shield]** to create footholds in the air, allowing her to jump up within striking distance.

“Take this!”

“GRAUGH!”

Linne swung both of her fists down hard against the Nidhogg’s back, setting off an explosive force right at the base of its wings. The creature was set completely off-balance by that, so before long, it tumbled down, smashing into the rocky ground below.

“Prismatic Guillotine!” Allis shouted as she brought her crystal machete down with perfect timing, completely shredding the Fiendrake’s wings. No matter what happened now, it would never fly again.

“Their attacks are pretty standard so far...”

“It’s smart to disable the wings. Same strategy you’d use with Wyverns,” Ende nodded and responded to my comment as we both watched what was unfolding.

The Nidhogg suddenly craned its neck and opened its mouth wide, glaring right at Frei.

Oh, I see what’s coming...

With a mighty *fwoosh*, flames billowed out from the Fiendrake’s maw. It was a classic fire breath attack.

“Oof,” Frei grunted as she suddenly dematerialized the spear in her hand, pulling out a heavy blue-white buckler shield from her **[Storage]** to take its place.

The Nidhogg’s fire breath lashed forward, hitting the shield head-on. But all the fire within a certain radius of the shield found itself diverting, protecting Frei completely. It was clearly some kind of magical artifact.

“Now!” Linne exclaimed as she suddenly burst in from the side, her gauntlet-clad fist smashing straight into the side of the Nidhogg’s face.

“GRAUGH?!”

Ouch. That’s gotta hurt.

“RAAAAAAAAAAARGH!”

The Nidhogg faced her this time, opening its mouth once more. But now it launched a volley of flaming globs instead of the direct stream it had unleashed earlier.

Linne was able to duck, dodge, and dive between the shots, avoiding harm. The same couldn’t be said for the nearby rocks, which exploded on impact and sent a hail of burning stones into the surrounding area.

“Hup!”

The Fiendrake’s tail lashed out, just barely missing Allis. The girl had crouched down low, then hopped back in order to get out of its range.

Frei stashed her buckler back into her **[Storage]**, swapping it out for a hefty battle-axe. She then charged headlong toward the Dragon, but it quickly realized her intent. Without hesitation, it began spewing flaming bullets toward her to ward her off.

“Wait...isn’t the Dragon a different color...?”

“Now that you mention it...”

The Fiendrake’s scales had lost their jet black luster and were gradually turning red. Eventually, even the reddish hue changed to black again, with luminous orange lines running through its body. The entire creature almost appeared to be composed of molten rock.

“GRARGH!” the Nidhogg gnashed its teeth as it roared yet again, sending sparks flying from its mouth. In an instant, its entire body bloomed into a flower of flame.

“GROAAAAAAAARGH!” with its entire body ignited, the Nidhogg let out a furious bellow. The heat rolling off it was so intense I could even feel it from my viewing area.

“Let’s see how the kids fare against its blazing malice form...” Karina grinned slightly as she gazed at the burning beast.

So what, you were waiting for this?

The intense flames made it hard to get close to the Dragon. If Elna or Quun were there, they might have been able to use Water or Ice magic, but that wasn’t currently an option.

“Yeowch, it’s hot! Do something, Frei!”

“Like what?! It’s easier said than done, you know?!” Frei replied to Linne as best she could while avoiding the Nidhogg’s claws.

“Uhm, let me see if I have anything enchanted with Water or Ice in here...” Frei mumbled as she started rummaging through her **[Storage]** space, looking for anything that could help. She organized her regular weapons pretty well, but her less-used ones were basically all cluttered up in there. It was a bit ridiculous to see her frantically looking through her stuff in the heat of battle.

“GRAGH!”

“Ah!” Frei yelped as she jumped to the side, avoiding another blazing swipe from the Fiendrake. That one was so close it had me on the edge of my seat.

“Hah!”

“GRARGH?!”

The Nidhogg was suddenly stopped in its tracks by a blast of raw chi from Linne’s fists.

“GRAGH!”

“Ack!”

As a consequence of drawing its attention away from Frei, Linne found herself almost struck by a flaming bullet launched from the Nidhogg’s mouth. She leaped up into the air to avoid it, using **[Shield]** to create more footholds for herself.

“Got it! The Icebringer!” Frei exclaimed as she raised a transparent blade high into the air. Even from as far back as I was, I felt a chill emanating from it.

“This blade was forged from eternal ice shaved from the perpetual frostwall in the Elfrau Kingdom! It all began five hundred years ago, when the elven spellsword Cradlestone needed to defeat Vocarumble the Manacrusher—”

“Skip the lore and just use it already!” Allis yelled out in a panic as she narrowly avoided the Fiendrake’s flames.

In response, Frei brandished the sword and pointed the tip toward the Nidhogg.

“**[Freezing]!**”

The air suddenly chilled, forming flakes of snow, which then clung to the Nidhogg’s body and cooled it down. The flames covering the beast died off, reverting its scales to their original black hue. But that proved to only be temporary... Soon enough, the flames began to lick their way outward from the Fiendrake’s cracked form once more.

“I can’t keep this up forever! Finish it now!”

“Got it! Prismatic Rose!” Allis replied as she formed a thorny vine of crystal around her right hand.

“Prismatic Guillotine!” she then exclaimed, as she conjured up her crystal machete on the end of the vine and began to swing it around like a whip. Once she’d built up sufficient force, she brought it slicing down on the monster’s tail.

“GYAAAAAAGH!”

With a sound that was more like a dull thud than a slicing chop, the Nidhogg’s thick tail was completely severed at the base. The Fiendrake lost its balance as a result, falling forward face-first.

Linne saw her chance and immediately cast **[Shield]**, using it like a staircase to get as high up into the sky as possible...before jumping down.

“Meteor kiiick!”

“GRARGH?!”

Her body had been enchanted with **[Gravity]** to make her even heavier as she drove the full force of that extra weight into the

Nidhogg's back. The impact was followed by a sickening crack from the monster's spine. Presumably, it broke.

"This is it for you!"

"Grauuugh..."

Before I could even tell what happened next, Frei ran her Icebringer through the Fiendrake's skull. In the blink of an eye, the Nidhogg froze over with ice.

"I'm gonna finish it!"

"W-Wait, Linne! Don't do what I think you're gonna do!"

Before Frei could stop her, Linne slammed a devastatingly powerful strike directly into the Nidhogg's side. Cracks ran out from the center of the impact, skittering across the surface of its body. The mighty Nidhogg's form shattered into a million little pieces, not unlike a fallen Phrase.

"A-Ah... O-Oh no..."

"...I can't say I'm terribly surprised."

As the Nidhogg crumbled, both Ende and Karina let out their own comments. Clearly, my daughter hadn't learned anything from her earlier hunts. Now there'd be no valuable resources to harvest from the beast. It was just frozen hunks of meat... Though maybe I'd be able to salvage something from the severed tail, at least. But still, this was more about the hunt than the spoils, so it was still a worthwhile venture.

"...I shouldn't have frozen it."

"I-It's not a big deal! We beat it!"

"I would've hit it the same way..."

Frei grumbled quietly as she opened up **[Storage]** in a wide radius and absorbed the frozen Dragon meat.

Oh yeah, I guess if we defrost it, it could still taste good.

Dragon meat was generally good, but I didn't know anything about Fiendrake meat. The Hydra I'd killed was too toxic to consume, at least.

"Daaaaaad! Where's the next Dragon?!"

"Now hold on a second... Let's at least take a break, okay? Lu and Arcia made us lunch."

I didn't want my reckless daughter getting herself caught up in her own impatience. It'd be better to rest before continuing the hunt, if we were even going to do that.

I took out a few chairs and a large table from my **[Storage]**, then set out the boxes of food Arcia and Lu had prepared for us.

"Wow, looks yummy!"

The first set of boxes contained rice balls. The second had greasy stuff like chicken, fried shrimp, croquettes, and southern fried chicken. The third set had fried eggs, sausages, hamburg steak, meatballs, cherry tomatoes, and a side salad. The fourth set had sliced fruits and healthy dessert items in it.

It all looked pretty yummy, but it was pretty clearly aimed more toward the kids.

"Let's eat!" I said as I conjured up a sphere of water for the kids to wash their hands in. They quickly rinsed their hands and started chowing down on the rice balls. They sure were eager...

I decided to have some too. I picked up one of the rice balls and took a big bite. It was just salty enough for my tastes, with tuna and mayonnaise inside.

"Bwugh! This one's pickled plum... You take it, dad..."

"Huh?! B-But, I... Okay..."

Allis bit into a rice ball and apparently disagreed with the filling, so she passed it to her dad to finish. Her lack of interest in pickled plums certainly betrayed the fact that she was just a child.

I chuckled a little at Ende's own reluctance, but then Linne suddenly came up to me with a rice ball of her own and held it up to me.

"Take this, dad..."

"You too, huh?"

I took the pickled plum rice ball from my daughter and begrudgingly chowed down on it.

Buegh! Eashen's are way sourer than the ones in Japan!

We took our time enjoying our food, but we all gradually noticed the noise from the nearby woodland growing louder.

"What's going on...?"

I heard the sounds of birds flapping their wings, of hooves on the ground, of rustling leaves and cracking branches...

Wait, no way... Don't tell me...

I quickly pulled out my phone and did a search for monsters and magical beasts in the local area. The results screen showed an enormous wave of red markers rushing straight toward us.

Oh shit! It's a stampede!

Stampedes typically began when monsters grouped up in a frenzy, running amok and charging forward in one big wave. And it didn't just involve monsters or magical beasts either. Regular animals often got swept up in the mix, creating a veritable tsunami of irrational danger.

At the moment, that raging wave was headed right toward us.

What should I do? If I wanna get everyone to safety, then I should just open a [Gate]... But there's a village nearby, and it's right in the

stampede's path... Hell, protecting that village is why we came out to hunt the Fiendrake to begin with. And based on how loud the stampede is, I doubt they'll stop.

"What do we do?"

"Well, we should probably stop it," I said as I nodded at Ende. Pam would be upset if we let the stampede go unhindered, anyway.

"Killing a ton of monsters?! Count me in!"

"Oh! Me too! Hey, Your Majesty! Lemme join too!"

"No. I'm not killing them. If we just randomly poach the whole crowd, it'd disrupt the local ecosystem."

"Aww..."

"Aww..."

Linne and Allis seemed disappointed, but I knew there'd be no point in killing the stampeding creatures. Magical beasts and monsters were good sources of food and materials for the local tribes. Killing them en masse was an easy feat, but also highly immoral.

"The smartest thing to do right now is to divert them. Let's see...
[Earth Wall]."

I erected a massive stone barrier that stretched several kilometers to my left and right. It was about twenty meters high. It was a great and mighty wall, more than capable of holding back a charging Dragon. And, at the very least, it granted us peace of mind.

"...I'll never get used to your insane powers, Touya," Ende mumbled as he slowly shook his head.

What?! I'll take the wall down when the stampede's over! It's fine!

"But won't the monsters just smash into the wall and crush each other?"

“Nope. It’s all good. I’ve infused the wall with a **[Gate]** enchantment that sends them about twenty kilometers backward.”

If the stampede kept on going, they’d just run in an endless loop until they tired themselves out. I’d come up with a rather simple, yet ingenious solution.

Still, what could’ve caused the stampede? These kinds of things typically happened as precursors to natural disasters. But there were no active volcanoes in the Sea of Trees, and I would’ve been warned by the spirits about any earthquakes.

If the monsters are panicking because they feel threatened...then did something show up that scared them?

I used **[Gate]** to move up to the top of the wall. It was more than ten meters thick, so I didn’t have to worry about falling off. I then looked off into the distance and saw the stampeding wave of monsters, a huge cloud of dirt behind them as they charged. It was clear to me they were fleeing something.

“I see... So that’s it, huh?” Karina seemed to have identified the cause in seconds.

“Hm?”

Huh? What can you see that I can’t? I just see trees and dirt clouds...

“[Long Sense].”

I projected my senses out toward the stampede.

Hm...? There’s something in the trees? No, it’s big enough to move the trees... Wait, what is that thing? Under...the trees? Wait, is that a head?!

I narrowed my gaze and finally realized exactly what I was looking at. A turtle. A ridiculously massive turtle. It was a turtle with a patch of forest on its back.

What the hell?! A Behemoth?!

“It’s a Zaratan. Rare to see them on land, I must say. It’s a type of magical beast that usually lives in the sea. There’s an old story about a group of sailors who found a mysterious island, only for it to be a Zaratan’s back. Oh, and it’s not a Behemoth either. That’s their normal size.”

“Seriously?”

No way... It’s way too huge. Isn’t it hundreds of meters across? Don’t think it’s over a kilometer, at least...

It was no wonder the beasts were running from that thing. It shook the ground with each step it took.

“Zaratans are extremely docile magical beasts. They just happen to be large, so they often leave a lot of collateral damage in their wake. I’m sure it’s probably just lost and confused,” Karina said, her expression filled with a sense of relief. I would’ve been a bit scared if the turtle was aggressive.

“Daaad! Are you gonna fight it?!”

“No, I don’t wanna do that...” I replied. I didn’t really know what else to say in response to Linne’s innocent question.

Can I even beat it? It’s larger than the wicked god was... What would I even do with its corpse?

“So wait, if this thing’s on land, then why hasn’t it caused stampedes before now?”

“Zaratans can hibernate for thousands of years. The forest probably grew on its back while it slept.”

So this thing’s just been sleeping in the Sea of Trees for thousands of years?

Fortunately, the Zaratan was slow, but less fortunate was the fact that it was so huge. Every step it took covered a considerable distance. At the rate it was going, it'd be at my wall before long.

"Why's it coming this way, though?"

"It might be trying to eat the stampede?"

"Oh, yeah. When you wake up, you usually want breakfast."

The kids had a few ideas, but I wasn't so sure any of them fit the bill. One thing was certain, though. If it kept on shambling slowly, it wouldn't catch anything.

Ende calmly looked off at the Zaratan before finally speaking up and saying, "It might be heading for the sea..."

"You think so?"

"Yeah. If it's an aquatic creature, maybe it's trying to get home?"

That made sense. If it wanted to return to the water, then it'd have to walk over to the other side of the nearby village. And that meant the Zaratan itself was just an innocent creature, making the stampede a mere byproduct of its existence.

"We'll return it to the sea, then."

"Whaaat, really? You're not gonna fight? But I wanted to ride a Frame Gear..."

"You can't solve everything through combat, Linne."

My daughter grumbled a little, but I wanted to show her that there was more to problem-solving than brute force. I did feel like a hypocrite saying that, though... Fighting was definitely how I solved most of my problems.

"So, uh, how are you gonna send it?"

"I was thinking of just using **[Gate]**."

It knew it wouldn't be hard to lock on to it, since it was pretty sluggish. Sure, a portal that large would suck up a lot of trees as well, but all the trees over there had gotten flattened by the Zaratan anyway, so it seemed like a fine solution.

I wasn't going to drop it into the sea directly, however. Instead, I planned to put it by the shore. If I plopped something that large directly into the water, it'd create a devastating tidal wave.

"But there's gotta be animals living on that turtle, right? Won't they die?"

Ah...

Allis had a great point. I hadn't even considered that. And so, after hearing her say that, I ran a search on my smartphone to see if there were any animals on the Zaratan's back. Sure enough, there were. Some were fleeing, while others were staying still. Either way, if the Zaratan returned to the sea, they'd drown and die.

Guess I'll warp the animals off first.

"Target lock. Every living creature on the Zaratan's back."

"Understood... Targets locked."

"[Gate]."

I warped all the animals off to another location, freeing them from the stampede. They quickly scattered and ran to safety.

"There we go. Now all I have to do is move the Zaratan and—"

"GROAAAAAAAAAAAAARGH!" a sudden, loud roar echoed out through the nearby area.

The hell?!

I looked over and saw the Zaratan roaring to the heavens. Its movements suddenly grew far more erratic, and its massive body began flailing from side to side.

“What’s happening now?!”

“...It’s hard to see from here, but there’s something by its feet. I believe the Zaratan is being attacked,” Ende said, narrowing his eyes.

“Say what?!”

Don’t tell me the tribespeople are attacking it. That’s way too reckless!

“No. It’s not the tribes. It’s...Gigants. Tsk. That’s not good. They’re really swarming the poor thing.”

I’d heard of Gigants. They were vicious magical beasts that resembled gigantic ants and lived deep underground. Once they started attacking, they wouldn’t stop until they were dead. They were connected through a hive mind, so if one started attacking, it’d usually communicate with all others in the vicinity and they’d join in. The only way to deal with them was to completely eradicate the nest, since no matter how far away you got from them, they’d never stop hunting you.

Now these swarming menaces were attacking the Zaratan... It had probably crushed one by mistake during its advance, which would’ve alerted the entire nest.

Gigants had strong enough jaws to tear limbs off the human body. The Zaratan was huge enough to survive that kind of onslaught, but the Gigants had an overwhelming numerical advantage. The sight honestly reminded me of stories I’d heard back on Earth, of the Amazon’s army ants that could pick entire cows and horses clean of their flesh given enough time.

From the looks of things, the Zaratan was definitely in pain... It was a bad situation all around. My concern wasn’t so much for the Zaratan, though. I didn’t think the Gigants would be able to kill it... But if they kept biting it, it’d surely go even more berserk, which would only serve to make the stampede worse.

“Let’s get the Zaratan out of here,” I said as I opened up a [Gate] beneath the Zaratan’s feet, sending it to the Sandora coastline. Naturally, all the nearby features of the forest, Gigants included, went tumbling through with it. I was fairly sure the portal I’d opened up led to an uninhabited area, but I followed them just to be on the safe side.

My eyes adjusted to the sight of a rocky beach area, with the sea spreading out far in front of me. I saw the Zaratan, forest still on its massive back, slowly walking toward the water. However, thousands of Gigants clung to the poor beast’s ankles, gnawing at its flesh without mercy or any signs of stopping. The great beast’s legs were covered in open sores, and a trail of blood followed after its slow march.

“Hey! Leave the turtle alone!” Allis suddenly yelled at the Gigants, manifesting her signature Prisma Rose whip in her hands. It looked like she couldn’t bear to see the poor creature in pain.

“Wait, Allis?!”

Heedless of Ende’s cries, Allis charged forward and cracked her whip, striking down one of the Gigants that clung to the Zaratan’s leg.

Gigants had an empathic hive mind. One Gigant’s pain was shared across all Gigants within a certain area. And now, thanks to that attack, all the Gigants turned their heads to look at us. A sense of dread overcame me.

The chittering Gigants began to crawl toward us, apparently recognizing us as enemies.

“Hey, dad! Can we kill these?! Can we?! Can we?!”

“...Yeah.”

“Hurray! Take this!” Linne merrily exclaimed as she started punching out the Gigants.

...Of course this happened.

“Hee hee hee hee... Time to test out my new weapons!”

I looked over and saw Frei slashing Gigant after Gigant with a set of twinblades I’d never seen before.

You too, huh?

I let out a small sigh as the kids began fighting the swarm.

The Gigants just kept coming, but the kids didn’t let a single one get past them. You’d think the Gigants would’ve learned their lesson, but apparently not. It would’ve been pretty easy for me to wipe them all out with magic, but I got the feeling the kids would get really fussy at me if I ruined their fun, so I elected not to.

“Well, uh...they sure are doing a good job...”

“Can’t lie, I feel pretty mixed about this as a dad.”

Ende and I could only stare blankly as our kids kept on fighting. I didn’t really know how I ended up with such frantic battle fanatics for kids... They didn’t really seem to do much ladylike stuff either... Frankly, it made me concerned for their marriage prospects... Then again, I wasn’t in any rush to give them away.

Yeah, I guess this is fine, actually. Keep killing those ants, kids!

“Oh yeah, the carapace of a Gigant sells for a lot. You should pick them up.”

“Oh, sure.”

Karina’s voice snapped me out of my pondering. I opened up **[Storage]** and sucked all the dead Gigants up into it.

“Prisma Hammer!” Allis exclaimed as she formed a giant crystal hammer and smashed a ton of Gigants at once... Unfortunately, that rendered them unsalvageable, so there was no collecting to be had for me there.

The number of Gigants gradually began to dwindle, and before long, the amount of them clinging to the Zaratan had gone considerably down. I'd also put as many as I could into my **[Storage]**.

The Zaratan finally made it to the water, one of his front feet submerging itself. The great beast was home safe.

"Last one!" Linne yelled as she charged forward with an explosive kick, blasting one final Gigant into a nearby dune. The beach was littered with the corpses of giant ants. There weren't any living ones left on the land, and the ones still clinging to the Zaratan were drowning in the sea. It was over.

"That was fun!"

"The turtle's safe too!"

"Mhm. That was really exciting."

The kids all started cheering and hugging each other as they celebrated their victory. Ende and I just sort of sighed in relief. If the kids were happy...that meant our trip had gone just fine.

"The Zaratan's heading out. Looks like it really did want to get to the water," Ende mumbled quietly as he watched the troublesome creature swim out deeper.

"Bye-byyyy! Don't come ashore again, silly!"

The kids waved goodbye to the Zaratan, and the creature turned its head and gave them a little half nod...almost as if it were responding. Then, just like that, it sank into the watery depths.

"It's gone."

"Sure is. Let's head back to the Sea of Trees and see if that stampede's over," I said before I warped us all back to the top of the wall I'd built.

Sure enough, the stampede seemed to be dying down. The beasts and animals that were once a uniform crowd were now slowly dispersing, which meant I could get rid of the wall.

I used Earth magic to undo the construction, returning the area to how it looked before.

“Well, there we go... Sheesh... It’s been a wild hunt...”

“It was really fun, though!” Linne screamed, seeming happy...which made me happy too.

“Okay, time to head home,” I said as I opened up a [Gate] and followed my kids through it.

We all made our way back to Brunhild Castle’s reception room. All my wives were there, enjoying a spot of tea. Melle, Ney, and Lycee were with them as well.

“Moms, I’m home!”

“Ah! Welcome home, Allis! Huh?!”

Allis charged forward, practically bounding into the air. Ney stood up and caught her in her arms.

“Welcome home, Allis.”

“Not hurt, are you?”

“I’m okaaay!”

Melle and Lycee crowded her too. They were probably worried about her... They had a habit of coddling her, as I recalled.

I looked over and saw Linne hugging Linze, while Frei was getting some head pats from Hilde. It was nice seeing them welcomed back in their own ways.

“You’ve been out a while, Touya. Did everything go okay?”

“Yeah, it was fine... As fine as it could’ve gone, at least.”

I could only say that and flash a strained smile in response to Yumina's question.

"Would you like some tea, Touya? Ende and Karina, how about you?" Lu asked as she quickly started preparing some refreshments, which was just what I needed before dinner.

In the background, I could hear Lu bickering with her daughter. Something along the lines of, "I'll make father's tea!" followed by "That's my responsibility! Stay in your lane!" and such.

I leaned back against the couch and closed my eyes.

Whew... I'm more tired than I thought.

It'd been a hell of a day, and I'd ended up being dragged around a lot by my kids. But while looking over at Linne and the rest of the kids telling Elze, Linze, and the others about the Fiendrake and the encounter with the Zaratan...I realized the fatigue was all worth it.

This isn't so bad, huh?

I smiled as I looked over at my family...when something suddenly materialized in the air and fell right on top of me.

"Ghagh!"

"Whagh?!"

The "something" made a strange noise, rolled off me, and landed on the next couch cushion over. It wasn't a something at all. It was a someone. A girl.

Where'd she come from?! Wait, no way...

"Daddy!" as soon as the girl saw my face, she yelled and gave me a big hug.

Agh... Is it really...?

"Yoshino?!"

“Yoshinooo!”

Frei and Linne confirmed my suspicions. It was Yoshino, Sakura’s daughter. She must have materialized above me with **[Teleport]**.

This was the sixth child now... They’d been coming in faster and faster as of late.

I slowly pried Yoshino’s hugging arms off me. Her pinkish hair was cut short, with a little cherry blossom hairpin clipped at the side.

She was Sakura’s daughter, so she had to be part of the overlord’s species...but there were no visible horns. Perhaps they were hidden in her hair? She was supposed to be older than Arcia, yet younger than Quun, so that put her at about nine...but she looked smaller than that.

She wore a navy blue dress with a fancy collar and hem... It kind of reminded me of the typical schoolgirl uniform back in Japan. Maybe you’d call it a sailor dress? I didn’t really know, but she sure was cute.

“You’re...Yoshino?”

“Ah! Mommy!” Yoshino exclaimed as she flew from my side and charged toward Sakura, pulling her into a tight cuddle.

Poor Sakura seemed more dazed and confused than anything else.

“U-Uhm...w-welcome...h-home?”

“Yay! I’m home!” Yoshino said, her smile wide.



The other children began to crowd her.

“Jeez, you showed up outta nowhere!”

“Nice to see you here, Yoshino.”

“You’re finally here, Yoshino...”

“Hurray, you’re here!”

“You’re late, sis!”

The kids started making a racket, but it was mostly celebratory cheering.

Let’s see here... So now there’s my second daughter Frei, third daughter Quun, fourth daughter Yoshino, fifth daughter Arcia, sixth daughter Elna, and the seventh is Linne...

I was once again overcome with shock at just how many kids I had. Then again, I did have a lot of wives...so it was probably inevitable.

“Ah?! Wait, I can’t get distracted! Daddy, you need to help! We’re in big trouble!” Yoshino abruptly turned toward me with a look of desperation on her face.

We? Who’s we?

It seemed like something big was going on...and whatever it was, I couldn’t ignore my daughter’s desperate plea.

Don’t worry, Yoshino! Whatever you need, I’ll provide!

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When Yoshino had landed in this time period, she’d ended up in the mountains of Triharan. She’d immediately started hunting monsters and traded their spoils for money. After that, she used **[Teleport]** to warp from town to town. She had her smartphone on her, so she

could've contacted us at any time, but she couldn't resist taking a look around a past version of the world she knew.

She went from Triharan to Strain, then to Allent, then to Panaches. She spent a day in each of these nations before finding herself on an island.

It was a small island called Arosa, which was located between Panaches and Palouf. It was part of a small handful of islands in the region. The inhabitants of the island were very kind and welcomed Yoshino with open arms. But then something strange happened. A group of unusual monsters emerged from the sea and began to attack the locals.

According to Yoshino, they were humanoid Fishmen. Their bodies were coated in scales, and they had fins on their backs. They also had sharp teeth and gills on their necks. There were ten of them in total, and they mercilessly set themselves upon the villagers.

By the time Yoshino had realized what was going on, a few of the people had been clawed or bitten by the Fishmen. She was quick to act after that, though. And once she'd taken out a few of the invaders, the rest of them retreated back into the depths.

Luckily, none of the villagers had died, but the ones who'd been bitten ended up collapsing with a fever, and then their bodies began to change.

"Change? How do you mean?"

"Scales started spreading out across their bodies from the wounds...and webbing appeared between their fingers and toes... It's like..."

"Like they were turning into the Fishmen who attacked...?" Sakura said, her words eliciting a nod from Yoshino.

In zombie movies back on Earth, being bitten by a Zombie typically turned you into one too. But the living dead of this world didn't have any such ability. They were just shambling corpses.

"I wonder what kind of bite can mutate the body in this way, I do..."

"If I were to guess, it'd have to be a curse of some sort," Leen replied to Yae.

Curses were typically imbued by ancient spells, but certain monsters had similar characteristics. The most obvious curse-inflicting monsters that came to mind were Basilisks, Cockatrices, and Catoblepones. They all had the ability to petrify their enemies. These Fishmen might have been monsters like that.

"Are there any Fishman-type monsters in this world? I've never heard of them."

"I've heard of Merfolk, but none with that kind of mutating ability. It could be a type of monster native to the other world."

Leen had a point. The Reverse World would obviously have creatures unique to it, just as the regular world did. Now that the two worlds had merged, there'd be some degree of crossover. And logically, it'd be much more likely to see flying or sea-dwelling monsters show up all over the place rather than land-dwelling ones.

"Anyway, we need to help the villagers! You can use **[Recovery]** to cure their conditions, right?!" Yoshino pleaded with me as she grabbed my arm. Tears welled up in her eyes. She sure was a kind girl... She barely knew those people, yet she was begging so fervently for their lives.

If their mutation really was caused by a curse, then my spell would be able to handle it. Besides, I just couldn't say no to my daughter's tears.

"All right, let's go. Tell me exactly where the place is, Yoshino."

“Hurray! Thanks, daddy!” Yoshino smiled wide and gave me a big hug.

Sakura reached out and gently stroked at the girl’s hair. She was a lot more loud and expressive than her mother, that was for sure... But honestly, I was quite glad. I always thought kids should be full of energy.

Elna nervously came running up to me and said, “I’ll come too! I can use **[Recovery]** as well!”

Oh yeah, I forgot about that.

I was thinking of just going myself to keep my kids out of harm’s way, but...I’d sort of forgotten about the Fiendrake and Gigant encounter we’d just been through. My children weren’t so fragile, after all.

“Sure thing, Elna. I’ll be counting on you.”

“A-Ah, okay! I’ll do my best!”

“I know you will, attagirl!” Elze came over and hugged Elna from behind, giving her a tight squeeze.

“Ahhh... She’s so cute! My little girl’s so cuuute...”

“M-Mother... You’re embarrassing meee...” Elna looked at me as she said that, seemingly pleading for help, but I firmly agreed with Elze.

Right after that, Yoshino told me exactly where Arosa Island was. I elected to teleport there first and open up a **[Gate]** after making sure it was safe.

“All right, let’s go.”

“Mhm...”

“Okay!” Yoshino exclaimed as she held her arms out. I grabbed her right, and Sakura grabbed her left. We could all use **[Teleport]**, so we didn’t actually have to hold hands, but Yoshino insisted.

She triggered **[Teleport]**, and the scenery around us immediately transformed into that of a calm beach.

It was almost dusk. The emerald sea in front of us gently lapped at the sands, while the calm breeze kissed my cheek. It was a veritable tropical paradise.

The beach was lined with houses on stilts, and I could even see some waterfront cottages by a pier a short distance away. The sight called the Maldives or Tahiti to mind.

“This way!” Yoshino yelled as she gestured toward me and Sakura.

We followed her into one of the stilt-houses. Inside, a woman was resting atop a simple straw bed. She had black hair and looked to be in her forties. I immediately noticed a bite wound on her right arm, and sure enough, blue scales were spreading out from it to her shoulder. Her fingers definitely looked like they were webbed too... Just as Yoshino had said, she was gaining fishlike features.

“Auntie Mau! I brought my daddy!”

“What’s that...? I told you to run, child... You silly girl...” the woman gave a weak smile as sweat beaded across her brow, her voice barely a whisper. She was still conscious, but she appeared to be teetering on the edge of delirium.

“Auntie Mau let me stay with her, and she fed me when I was here. Please help her!”

“Yeah, don’t worry. I’ve got this. **[Recovery]!**”

I cast my spell and touched the woman’s arm. The scales immediately faded away in a flash of light. Just as I’d suspected, it was a curse. I also cast **[Mega Heal]** and **[Refresh]** on her for good measure.

The color slowly returned to her face, and her eyes snapped wide open.

“How do you feel now?”

“My arm... It’s healed... There’s no pain at all. How did you do that?” Mau asked. She looked absolutely astonished as she traced her arm with her fingertips. She was all better now.

“Are you okay, aunty?”

“Mhm, I’m fine. Thank you... Your daddy’s an amazing man...” Mau said. Then, she smiled as she reached out to stroke Yoshino’s hair, which made a little smile creep over the girl’s face.

That was one person safe, but I still needed to heal the others. And so, I walked out of the stilt house and cast **[Gate]**. Elna led the charge, and soon enough, everyone from the castle’s reception room followed through the portal behind her.

“Hm? You’re here too, Ende?”

“Allis insisted we come...”

I shrugged as I looked over at Ende’s family, as well as my own wives.

...You guys aren’t gonna have anything to do here without Healing magic, you know?

“Don’t worry, I’ll prepare food for the villagers. They’ll be exhausted after this ordeal. Arcia and the others can help.”

“Sure thing!”

Lu and Arcia began busying themselves, and I certainly couldn’t complain about their intentions.

[Recovery] helped reverse unusual bodily conditions, but since the curse’s progression varied by person, it would be better to treat everyone individually rather than all at once. Thankfully, I wasn’t the only person here who could cast it.

“All right, Elna. You start casting **[Recovery]** on anyone who needs it. If you’ve got other Healing spells, feel free to use those if you think they’ll help. Same goes for you guys.”

“O-Okay, got it!” Elna said as she nodded firmly.

There were five people here other than me who could use Light-aspected Healing magic: Linze, Sue, Leen, Elna, and Quun. We all split up and began to heal the afflicted villagers. The others were helping Lu and Arcia, using Earth magic to build an oven to help cook. Melle and the rest of her family waded into the ocean to spear some fish.

“That should be everyone...” I mumbled as I let out a sigh and sat down on the beach. It had taken a while, but all the villagers were finally cured. Just after I yawned, Yoshino appeared and tugged at my sleeve.

Hm? What’s up?

She was with Sakura, and they both implored me to follow. I went after them and found three dead Fishmen crumpled in a heap. Their bodies were scorched in various locations. Presumably, they were the ones from the earlier attack.

“Did you do this, Yoshino?”

“Mhm. I have Fire and Wind magic, so I used compound spells.”

Fire and Wind? I thought Sakura had Water and Darkness, though. That’s totally different from what she’s got. Anyway, putting that aside... Compound magic, really? That’s some pretty top-tier spellcasting.

“Do you have any Null spells other than **[Teleport]**, Yoshino...?”

“Mhm. I have **[Absorb]** and **[Reflection]**.” Yoshino promptly replied to Sakura’s question. That meant she had three. Pretty impressive, really.

Wait, no... Quun has [Enchant], [Mirage], [Program], and [Modeling], so that's four... Elna has [Multiple] and [Boost]... Plus, [Absorb] and [Reflection] are both anti-magic abilities, so they kind of overlap. Then again, [Absorb] is more about sucking up magic, while [Reflection] diverts it, so it's not exactly the same. Either way, that makes her pretty much impossible to beat with magic... That's wild.

I looked over the Fishmen. They looked like no Merfolk I'd ever seen before.

I guess it's a new kind of monster? But...what's this strange feeling I get when I look at them? Don't tell me...

I toggled my divine sight and immediately scowled at what I saw.

"What's wrong, daddy?" Yoshino asked.

"[Apport]."

I used my magic to pull out the Fishman's heart. A baseball-sized octahedron manifested in my hand. It was the same thing I found within the wicked devout's Golems. The same device that had been used as a stand-in for their G-Cubes had been beating within the Fishman's chest... Well, it wasn't entirely the same, but it was close enough. The one embedded in the Golem had been blood red, while this one was deep blue. But, just like the red one, there was a hint of muddled divinity flowing from it.

"What is this...?"

"The work of those annoying wicked devout folks, I think..."

But what did they have to gain by attacking this island? I didn't think this place was especially important. Maybe they hadn't targeted this island specifically? It could easily be that they'd sent Fishmen all over the place just to attack whoever they found. But what would the point in that be? Why did they have such an infectious curse?

"Hup..."

“Ow?!”

I was crouched over the corpse, lost in thought, when Sakura suddenly karate-chopped me in the head.

What was that for?!

“You look too worried... It’s bad for our daughter to see you concerned... Que será, será... Whatever will be, will be...”

I guess you’re right. Not much we can do right now.

Sakura suddenly began to sing.

Oh, hey. I know this one...

“Oh, I know this song!” Yoshino said before she started to sing along with her mother.

The song had the same meaning as the words Sakura had just spoken... “Whatever will be, will be.” It was the main theme song of an American movie from the 1950s, performed by the actress who starred in it. The song ended up getting translated into Japanese and became pretty popular.

Sakura and Yoshino both sang in perfect harmony, their gentle voices echoing across the beach.

Wow, I’m surprised Yoshino can sing so well. No, wait...it actually makes a ton of sense.

The newly healed villagers ended up walking over and asking me about the song.

The two continued singing for quite some time, and soon enough, the entire village had surrounded them. Their voices were utterly bewitching.

When they finally stopped singing, they were met with a round of applause. Sakura didn’t show much emotion in response, but Yoshino kind of hid behind her mother’s leg out of shyness.

“Food’s ready!”

I walked over to the stone-magicked table on the beach. It was lined with all kinds of dishes cooked up by Arcia and Lu.

...Wow, that’s a lot.

The recovering villagers thanked everyone for the help and dug right in. They certainly weren’t in any condition to cook for themselves, so it was likely a very welcome meal.

Before joining them, I shoved one of the dead Fishmen into my **[Storage]**. I figured having Doc Babylon, Tica, and Flora take a look at it later on might be helpful. Looking into its genetic makeup could yield some answers, after all.

I didn’t know what these wicked devout were planning, but they’d made my daughter cry... That alone was unforgivable.

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Meanwhile, in the Magitechnocracy of Isengard...the trade hub of Sieglan, located in the south of the country, was in a state of disarray. It was once a bustling mercantile city that kept up active trade with the Gardio Empire, but ever since Meteor Day, it had been isolated from the rest of the world.

What was once a place filled with life was now little more than a hollow slum. It had all begun with an alleged miracle drug, a potion that kept corruption at bay, purported to have been made from ground-up Puretree branches. Naturally, the people flocked to buy it. And all of them were, unfortunately, unaware of how catastrophically addictive it was.

Those who’d ingested it soon lost their vitality, becoming little more than shambling, apathetic husks. Many were crippled by the addiction, and soon enough, they wasted away and died.

Those unlucky enough to survive gradually underwent physical changes. Some of these changes were more prominent than others... Some of the afflicted grew scales on their skin, while others grew sharp claws where their nails had once been. Their minds changed alongside the physical deformation as well. Their sanity gradually slipped away...until all they could think about was getting more of the drug that had hooked them. They lost their sense of reason, reduced to little more than raging beasts.

A weakened man was in one of Sieglan's back alleys, his mind long gone. He was once a butcher. And at the suggestion of one of his regular customers, he tried a cheap, yet effective, medicine. At first, he thought it was a scam...but he took a few doses and felt his worries float away. His pain, his sorrow, his doubt...all were wiped from his body. He felt euphoric.

He needed more. He abandoned his business and skulked around town looking for as much as he could get. At first he only bought it, but eventually, he was fine stealing it.

The more medicine he took, the more his body changed. He grew physically larger, his skin hardened. He became almost like an Orc. And yet, the man didn't care. In fact, the man likely didn't even notice.

The medicine became scarcer as time went on. The man's stress levels rose in turn. He became anxious. He fell into fits of depression and rage. Nothing he did eased his heart. He was angry and sad all at once. He became aggressive, lashing out for the smallest things. The few people remaining in his life soon left him, but that only accelerated his mental decline.

When he began killing people for looking at him wrong, he felt nothing. He only had the capacity for impatience, exhaustion, and irritability. He hated the people around him, for they refused to give him his fix. He hated the town itself, for it lacked an adequate supply

of what he needed. He hated the world, for it had failed to deliver that sweet rush directly into his veins.

The man collapsed in a filthy alley, weakened and filled with spite, cursing the world that brought him here. And then...two shadowy figures appeared before him.

"Here he is. Let's hope it's not another failure," the man in a metal plague doctor's mask muttered as he glanced down at the prone man. A metallic red rapier sat at his waist.

"The drug he took had a concentrated dosage. He should still have his ego intact, so I think you'll find him to your liking," the man in a spherical diver's mask answered his beaked friend. One wouldn't expect him to see very well through the latticed peephole on the front of his headgear, yet he seemed to see just fine. A metallic blue hatchet sat at his own waist, glowing faintly.

The former butcher glared up at the two men, rage faintly burning behind his gaze.

"Me...di...cine... Give...me..."

"I've something better than medicine for you, friend," the man in the plague mask merrily said as he pulled a pistol out from a deep pocket, aiming it at the man's chest. He then pulled the trigger without a moment of hesitation, shooting the former butcher square in the heart.

Oddly enough, there wasn't any blood. The struck man began to convulse, but he didn't die.

"Ghah... Ghkah... Ghkhah!"

"Don't die, okay? It'd be a real pain to find another candidate..."

The former butcher's body began to change even more. His muscles expanded, bulging blood vessels peeking out from beneath his taut

skin. His eyes rolled back into his head and a strained scream leaked out past his lips.

Eventually, he stopped convulsing and stilled. He was unconscious, but he certainly wasn't dead.

"Bingo."

"Hah... And thus the new devout is born."

The former butcher rolled onto his back, revealing his bare chest. A disturbing, ominous pattern sprawled out across it, with the gunshot wound as the center. He slowly staggered to his feet.

"Hey there. You feeling okay?"

"Not... Awf...ul... Feel...better..."

The man's muscles were pulsing and rippling. He honestly looked ready to burst. But he didn't seem to be in any pain as he looked up to the sky with sunken eyes.

"...Maybe he took too much? What's with the way he's talking?"

"It's not a big deal if he talks funny, right...? Oh, it's manifesting."

"Ghah?! Wh...at...?!"

The former butcher began clutching at his chest. His ribs suddenly bent outward, his upper torso exploding into a shower of blood...and a shining, sticklike object suddenly burst out of his open wound.

The butcher was still lucid, however, and he reached out with wavering hands to pull the object free.

"It's pretty big... Is it a greatsword?"

"Don't think so, but... Oh, now I see."

As the butcher pulled the object from his chest, the full shape of the blood-smeared manifestation was revealed. The handle of the weapon was thick and rugged, like the kind you'd find on a machete.

But the blade was, well... It was obvious what the weapon was. The beast of a man held a metallic brown meat cleaver in his hands.

“So that’s the shape his wicked vessel has taken?”

“I...cut... I...cu...t...meat...” the butcher stared vacantly as he spoke, his jaw slack and listless.

Not long after, there were various reports of bodies in the streets of Sieglan. They’d all been sliced up into chunks of meat.

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Meanwhile, in the icy Elfrau Kingdom.

“Hmhm...”

A lone boy walked through a snowy plain. It wasn’t snowing, but the boy was still not properly dressed for such a cold climate. The clothes he wore were rather modest, but anyone with a discerning eye would’ve realized it was a custom-fit outfit woven from the finest of materials. At a glance, one would probably assume the boy to be a spoiled rich kid. But he wasn’t just that... He was a royal child from a particularly powerful family.

The boy looked to be around five or six years old. He had silky blond hair tied up behind his head and a perfectly adorable face.

“Wh-Where’d I drop my phone...? Wah...if Yakumo or Yoshino were here, I could warp out... Hm?”

The boy suddenly noticed something running toward him in the distance. It was an enormous white canine, which bounded toward him at incredible speeds. As it got closer, he realized it was a magical beast. A Snow Wolf.

Snow Wolves were considered red-rank monsters, and they were known for their agility, brutality, and ice manipulation abilities. Even grown men had trouble hitting these creatures, and they were known to gobble up men, women, and children without hesitation.

And yet, the sight of the Snow Wolf yielded no fear from the boy. Instead, he breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thank goodness.”

“RAAARGH!” the Snow Wolf bellowed at the boy. Just as the beast closed in, surely to swallow the boy whole, the two of them locked eyes.

While he’d inherited his mother’s blonde hair, the boy had his father’s dark eyes. But in that moment, his right eye shifted to a dark gold. It was a kind of muddy gold with a faint hint of green mixed in.

The stare from his right eye, filled with green-gold light, seemed to pierce the Snow Wolf to its core. In a matter of seconds, the hulking canine grew docile and fell to the ground, resting on its stomach.

“Grhhh...”

“There we go. Good boy! Sorry, but I need to ride you. Take me to people, okay?”

With that, the boy clambered up onto the Snow Wolf’s back and snuggled into its fuzzy fur.

“Oh, how cozy... Let’s go.”

“Ruff!”

The Snow Wolf began charging through the snow as fast as it could, taking care not to jostle the little lad on its back.

Interlude: The Magnificent Mochizuki Mochi Malleting

“This is from Tokugawa-sama, it is...”

A large whumph rang out as Yae dropped a massive sack of rice on the floor.

A usual sack's around sixty kilos, isn't it? Wait, no... Eashen is like Japan in the Sengoku Era, and they measured it differently back then... Or at least, that's what my grandpa said. But why did they send rice?

Brunhild grew both wheat and rice in equal measure. We had plenty of Eashenese citizens, so it was true that we sometimes imported rice when we had a shortfall, but I didn't remember making any such order. We had more than enough in the castle's stores, after all.

“Oh, it's finally here! This looks like more than enough!”

As I was pondering, Arcia poked her head in and ran toward the bag of rice. That was enough for me to realize what had happened. She must've put in an order for this bag through the gate mirror room.

“Why the sack, exactly?”

“This is glutinous rice, father.”

“Glutinous rice, is it? That is a rather out of season order, it is...”

Eashenese people would ring in the new year by eating rice cakes made out of this stuff, but it was well into the year at this point. Then again, it wasn't like that was the only use for it. Dango was a popular year-round treat, after all. You could also make mochi with it, and that could have all kinds of tasty fillings. Still, did we really need this much sweet rice? I was certain we had some in the pantry already...

“I’ve always wanted to try making various mochi treats, but I never had the opportunity!” Arcia grinned boastfully, but Yae and I were more concerned by the figure standing behind her.

“So you took the liberty of ordering it through the gate mirror, did you? Do you think it’s proper to use government channels for your personal ends?”

“Ah?! M-M-M-Mother?!” Arcia let out a small yelp in response to her mother showing up.

Lu was smiling just as her daughter had been, but her eyes were devoid of light. She ended up lecturing our daughter for a while after that, and I ended up settling the fee out of my own pocket. I didn’t want to have our taxpayers cover it, since there’d be hell to pay if they ever found out... When all was said and done, it ended up being a bit pricey, though.

I’d said it when I founded the country, and I reiterated it again, the Mochizuki family was to live on their own dime, not propped up by the taxes of the populace.

If Arcia wanted sweet rice so much, she should’ve told me. I would’ve just gone to Eashen myself.

“So, you were planning to make something with this, you were?” Yae asked, butting in on the tail end of the lecture and rescuing Arcia from more of her mother’s wrath.

Clearly pleased to be saved, Arcia replied, “Uhm, well...yeah. I’d like to make all kinds of dishes. I want to make traditional mochi candy, rice cake gratin, and any other things we can think of...”

“Mochi treats, you say...? That reminds me of the zunda mochi I had not too long ago, it does.”

“Oh yeah, that was some good stuff...”

Right, I remember having some good mochi that time when the Date princess was on the run in Eashen. It was really good. I've wanted to do some old-fashioned mochi pounding for a while now, but I never found the time... Maybe this is the chance I've been waiting for?

"Let's do some mochi pounding."

"Hurray! I knew you'd agree, father!" Arcia exclaimed as she charged over to give me a big hug, only for Lu to drag her away by the scruff of her neck.

"What was that for, mother?! I was just bonding with him!"

"Clearly nothing I just said sank in at all. I'll have to start again from the top."

"Wh-What?!"

Without any further delay, Lu dragged Arcia away. I could see my daughter silently begging for help, but there was nothing I could do when faced with Lu's glare.

"L-Let us prepare for the mochi pounding in the meantime, yes? Shall I prepare us a mortar and mallet, shall I?"

"I can make those. You need to soak the sweet rice for a day, right? Guess we can start that today and do the actual pounding part tomorrow. We'll ask some off-duty knights and maids to chip in and help."

My **[Modeling]** Null spell would make it easy enough to create everything we needed to pound the mochi.

I'll have my kids help out too. It'll be fun if we all eat the mochi we make together.

I smiled to myself as I pulled out some wood from **[Storage]** and set to work on the tools.

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“All steamed!”

Lu and Arcia heaved the steaming sweet rice into the large barrel mortar I’d constructed.

We were all gathered in the courtyard alongside everyone who wanted to join in on the fun. My family was there, as was Ende’s. Then there were various knights, maids, and a few interested civilians who’d been vetted. The plan was to pound all the rice, so we didn’t want any to go to waste.

I made three sets of mortars and mallets. Each one had a designated pounder and a designated mochi mover assigned to them. I was on the first one, with Yae turning. Then the second one was manned by Yae’s brother Jutaro and his fiancée Ayane. The third was being manned by Tsubaki and one of the former Elite Four of Takeda, Baba. They were all from Eashen, so they had experience with this kind of thing.

I was actually the least experienced person present. I’d only made a little at my grandpa’s when I was a kid. From what I remembered, you had to knead and crush the rice up with the mallet before pounding it.

“All right, everyone! Go!”

“Got it!”

I was still grinding the rice when I saw Baba and Tsubaki start pounding away. They were moving in perfect tandem.

“Hup!”

“Hah!”

“Hyup!”

“Hah!”

Jutaro and Ayane were working in perfect sync as well. I didn't want to lose... I wanted to show everyone how well Yae and I could work together!

Let's go!

"Hup! Ack—?!"

I swung the mallet, but staggered slightly on the way down and hit the edge of the container.

Gah! It's surprisingly hard to get the balance right!

"Ahhh, dear... You must not exert yourself, you must not. It is best to raise the mallet and let it fall naturally, it is."

R-Right... I should just let it fall with its own weight instead of swinging it.

I took Yae's advice and raised the mallet again before letting it drop down directly.

Ka-flat!

"There you are. That was a good hit, it was."

Squish!

"One, two... One, two..."

Squish!

Yae's words served as my guide, allowing me to keep up the frantic pounding.

Yeah, I'm doing good now! If I keep this up, I'll have no problem at all!

"Daaad, me too! I want to try!" Linne called out from behind me as I was in the midst of my mochi malleting. She seemed to have taken an interest in the matter.

Mmm... I wanted to do a little more, but I guess it's fine. I'm doing this for my kids, so it's whatever.

"Yae, let me do the turning. We'll swap out every so often," I said as I handed the mallet over to a very excited-looking Linne and took my new position. The mallet was pretty heavy, but it didn't seem like the kind of thing my kids couldn't handle.

I dipped my hands in water to prevent the pounded mochi from sticking to my skin.

"Go!"

"HYAAAH!"

SPLAT!

A sound that shouldn't have been generated by mochi pounding inexplicably erupted around us. The mortar had sunk into the ground a little, while the mallet had sunk into the middle of the mochi, leaving an indent that had it looking more like a donut.

D-Did you just use [Gravity]?! Are you stupid?!

"Linne! You can't cast that!"

"Huh?"

What do you mean, huh?! I cast [Protection] on both the mallet and the mortar, but you could still break them! And even that aside, you could destroy the mochi itself!

"Okay, let's try that again! Go!" I barked out as I started to turn over the mochi as Linne began pounding away at it.

"Next!"

"Okay!"

"Ne— Ack?! Wait! Too fast! Get the timing right!"

I only just pulled my fingers away in time to stop the mallet from crushing my fingers.

What the hell, Linne?! Get it together!

Part of me glared up at her in suspicion... Was she trying to get me on purpose? Was this all a joke to her?!

“Touya, let me take your place...” Linze mumbled. She’d apparently noticed my stress, which prompted her to swap places with me. I reluctantly accepted, hoping her fingers would be spared.

“Hup!”

“Next!”

“Hup!”

“Next!”

In a display that completely contrasted to how I’d been doing it, Linne and her mother pounded the mochi in perfect tandem... I couldn’t help but feel a little jealous.

I looked over and noticed that Tsubaki and Baba had swapped places with Ende and Allis.

“Hyah!”

“Hngh!”

“Haaah!”

“Gwah?!” Ende yelped as he moved his fingers out of the way just in time to keep them from being flattened. Allis’s swinging had a pretty unique rhythm to it, but there was definitely a pattern. Ende probably felt like he was being psyched out on every swing, though.

“Endymion! Knead it more firmly!”

“That’s right! Support Allis! Put your back into it!”

The look on Ende’s face said it all... He wanted to tell them to try it themselves if they thought it was so easy, but the poor bastard held his tongue.

Melle simply smiled over at the mochi-pounding duo, thoroughly entertained by the display.

“Ready!”

At Linze’s call, Arcia pulled out the pounded mochi and plopped it down on a flour-covered board. Lu then divided it into bite-sized chunks and started spreading them out.

“Fresh mochi over here! I’ll be making more, so there’s no rush!”

At the sound of Lu’s voice, some of the surrounding individuals headed over to the table with small plates. They started eating the mochi rice cakes, using toppings like natto, sesame seeds, red bean paste, green soybeans, and roasted soy flour. Some of them even opted to simmer the mochi in broth.

“Here, father!”

“Oh, hey, thanks.”

Arcia brought me a bowl of broth with some fresh mochi in it. It was a simplistic dish with chicken, radish, fish paste, and honeywort.

I looked down at the mochi cake as it soaked in the broth. It looked pretty yummy. Meals didn’t have to be complex to be delicious, after all. One bite proved that. Right as I started to dig in, Lu walked over with a bowl in her hand.

“Please try this one as well, dear.”

“Mother? I-Is that...curry mochi?!”

The bowl Lu had brought over contained what appeared to be curry roux in a broth, as well as a mochi rice cake.

Wait...curry and mochi? Together? Well, I guess bread and other grains work with curry, so this should work too.

I took a bite.

Wow! This is great! Curry really goes with everything, huh?

The mochi acted as a great offset to the curry's spiciness, while the sliced vegetables really accentuated the aftertaste.

"Grr... That's not a proper dish!"

"There are no rules when it comes to culinary delight, dear. If it tastes good, then the sky's the limit. You ordered so much rice because you wanted to try out various dishes, yes? Then you should experiment until you're satisfied."

"I will, then!"

I silently finished my curry. Arcia, apparently fired up by seeing Lu's creation, dashed back to the kitchen area to get started on something else.

Lu smiled softly, sitting down and taking a spoonful of the broth Arcia had created.

"Delicious. She's certainly got the fundamentals down, that's for sure. I'd expect nothing less from our daughter."

"Why not just say that to her face?"

"I can't have her getting too complacent yet, now can I? She's still got a ways to go before transcending my talents."

...You're both princesses, aren't you? It's not like either of you HAVE to cook. Besides, I doubt she'll get complacent...

I glanced over and saw the three Phrase girls chowing down on enough rice cakes that one might think they were participating in an eating contest...

"Ahhh, delicious! Allis really made something great today!"

"Indeed... She must've put her heart and soul into it. I'm proud."

"Great job, Allis. We love it."

“Hee hee hee... It’s not THAT great!” Allis exclaimed as she blushed red due to her mothers’ praise. Her father, on the other hand, was pale white with exhaustion.

“Been a while since I’ve had some good mochi.”

“You’re quite right, Naito. Maybe we should make some more?”

“Sounds like quite the plan. I’m sure there must be a demand for it. What do you think, Kousaka-dono?”

“Aye. I think we can popularize the practice around here.”

The former elites of Takeda quietly put a plan into motion as I tucked into a delicious nori-wrapped morsel.

“The soy flour mochi is really nice, mother.”

“Sure is! I’m pretty big on this red bean soup myself.”

“Nomph! It’sh sho good! More!”

“Linne! Don’t talk while you’re eating!”

Elna, Elze, Linne, and Linze all seemed to be enjoying themselves.

“This is yummy!”

“It is truly delicious, it is!”

“...Are you two going to be done any time soon?” Hilde asked. She could only look on in horror as Frei and Yae devoured a veritable mountain of mochi before her very eyes. If anything, it was more impressive that Frei was doing it, given how much smaller she was.



I looked over and saw the knights chowing down too. The Eashenese ones all appeared to be nestled in nostalgic memories, while the others were intrigued by the food they'd clearly never had before.

"Father, here!" Arcia said as she came back from the kitchen area with a few pieces of mochi cut into squares.

...Daifuku cakes? A sweet treat to balance out the curry, huh?

I took a bite and sweetness soon spread out inside my mouth. It was strawberry mochi... I hadn't tasted this particular flavor in years.

"Strawberries? I hadn't considered including that alongside the red bean paste... I must admit you've outsmarted me, Arcia," Lu stated as she ate the strawberry mochi with a mixture of surprise and satisfaction on her face. Her words prompted our daughter to bashfully avert her gaze, which earned a raised brow from both me and Lu.

"...Arcia, did you think of this on your own?"

"Umm... Well...you made this in the future, mother...so I wanted to try making it too... It was really good."

...Lu made this in the future? But didn't Arcia just teach Lu about it for the first time here? Isn't this a huge time paradox?! Where did Lu learn about the strawberry mochi to begin with?

I just sighed and quietly assumed Granny Tokie and the time spirits would take care of any issues. There was no point in questioning the power of the gods.

"Mmm... You can do lots of other stuff with mochi cakes."

"Other things? You mean more fillings and such?"

"Really, father? Like what?"

The two girls turned to me with inquisitive eyes. It was moments like this that you could really tell they were mother and daughter.

“Well...there’s pineapple mochi, mandarin mochi, kiwi mochi...grape mochi?”

“Those all sound rather sour... I wonder how well they’d go with the bean paste.”

“Well, you could go with watermelon or tomatoes, if that’s not to your taste...”

“Watermelon and tomatoes?! I can’t imagine how that would taste...”

Me neither. I’ve never tried it.

“Oh, there’s butter mochi too.”

“B-Butter? I don’t think that’d go well with the bean paste at all...”

“Oh, no. I didn’t mean as a filling. It’s a cake you make by mixing butter and mochi. Here, take a look...”

I quickly looked up a couple of websites that showed some pictures, then sent them to both the girls.

“Hm, so you mix it with butter...”

“It looks tasty. Should we make it, mother?”

“I’d be glad to try it. Let’s go.”

Lu and Arcia walked over to the kitchen area. I also found a recipe for butter mochi with red beans, so I sent that over as well. That one didn’t seem all that hard to make or anything.

Man, I sure ate a lot... Better work some of this off.

I headed over to the mortar and found the knights hard at work pounding the mochi.

Wait, why’s it green?

“It’s mugwort mochi. Tastes great when rolled into dango.”

I turned around and found Kousuke offering me a skewer of green dango dumplings.

Mugwort, huh? Sure smells nice. The color’s good too... Oh yeah, this tastes great.

As I was filling my stomach, I suddenly heard the sound of music drifting through the area. In response, I looked over and saw Sousuke, the god of music, playing his violin.

Hold up. That song, of all things? I guess it is a dumpling song, sure... Usually dumplings come in sets of three, but this one’s about four.

Sakura started singing along with the performance. It was an original song created for a kid’s show, but the lyrics were memorable enough for people to get into it. Perhaps it was due to the song, but everyone started to gravitate toward the dumplings. Dumplings weren’t exactly meant to be the main food, but everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves, so it was whatever.

“Hrmm... This is yummy, but it’s hard to eat...”

I looked over and saw Kohaku struggling with a rice cake. Luli and Sango seemed to be struggling as well. Kougyoku seemed to be handling it just fine, however, and Kokuyou was just swallowing the stuff whole. It’d probably be easier for them if they were rolled smaller...and not on sticks.

I took a few mugwort dumplings off a skewer and put them on a plate for Kohaku and the others.

“Thank you, my lord... It’s easier to eat now,” Kohaku said before she began to greedily chow down.

...Is it okay for cats to eat mochi? Well, she’s not really a cat, is she? She’s a heavenly beast, so I’m sure it’s fine.

Luli and Sango started to gulp down their dumplings too.

“Don’t eat too fast. They might stick to your throat.”

“Understood.”

I turned away from Kohaku and the others just in time to see my kids appear, each carrying something.

“Father, we made different daifuku cakes for you.”

Each of my kids held out a plate with different treats on them. Arcia’s was the butter mochi I’d told her about earlier.

Hrkh... But I’m already so full.

In the end, I gave in to the laser-eyed stares of my children and resolved to eat everything. I figured I’d push myself through, so I needed to steel my stomach and my soul.

“Here, try this,” Elna said as she held out a little mochi cake toward me. It was crudely shaped, but looked tasty. I took a bite.

“Oh! Pineapple!”

“Mhm... Arcia showed me how to make it...”

The sour taste of pineapple spread out over my tongue. Pineapples were available in Mismede, so they could be imported for relatively cheap. It was totally delicious.

“Me next, father!” Frei exclaimed. Her daifuku was a little more sloppy than Elna’s. I could see the red bean paste bulging out of it at certain parts. I popped it into my mouth and was immediately struck by an indescribable fusion of tastes and textures. It wasn’t so bad that I wanted to puke, but it was a serious taste mismatch.

“What...? What’s in this?”

“Beef!”

B-Beef?! It's supposed to be a mochi cake! What are you feeding me?!

I gritted my teeth and finished the beef cake, hoping Frei would never, ever make one again.

"Oh, please try mine next!" Yoshino pleaded. She was up next, it seemed. I took a bite and was surprised to find a crunchy texture. There was a slight saltiness mixed in with the sweetness, accentuating the paste as it spread through my mouth.

"...What is this?"

"A pickle!"

A...pickle? That's a...weird combo... But I guess I saw something similar on TV once... In Kyoto, maybe? The flavor isn't actually that bad, but it doesn't make for a good mouthfeel at all.

"Mine next, father."

I took Quun's creation in hand, suspicious of the shining pink I could see poking out of the side. It wasn't well wrapped at all, but I put it in my mouth anyway.

Bwugh... What's this fishy taste?!

"I know you're fond of tuna, father, so I put it in the cake."

Tuna?! I-I do like it, yeah, but it has no business being in a mochi cake, dammit! Does this have wasabi in it too? I think I'm gonna sneeze...

"Me next, dad! Me next!"

Linne's daifuku was a little larger than the rest of them. It was about the size of a bao bun. I was honestly at my limit as far as eating went, but I was in too deep to stop.

"Here I go..." I mumbled as I took a bite out of the daifuku, which made a thick paste suddenly spurt out and fill my cheeks. I blinked in

surprise, looking at the thing I'd just bitten into. The paste inside was a reddish-brown.

Is this...curry? A curry daifuku? I've heard of that, maybe? But...I... Oh... Ohhh...

"AUUUGH! IT'S HOT! IT'S SPICY! OW! OWWW! AAAAAAAAARGH!"

It was so spicy that I had to grit my teeth. It was like experiencing déjà vu. I'd tasted this kind of spice before... It was a level of pain I'd hoped never to be subjected to again, so it took me right back to the one and only time Elze had ever cooked for me.

"Man...I knew this would happen..."

"Seriously, why does everything Linne cook turn out so spicy?"

Frei and Yoshino sighed as they glanced at each other.

Why didn't you warn me if you knew this would happen?!

Apparently, Elze's ability to turn any recipe into a hazard had been passed on not to her daughter Elna, but Linze's daughter. Or maybe it was just some latent ability unique to the Silhoueska bloodline.

Why won't it stop being so spicy?! It completely overpowers the bean paste! This is way too much! There's no complementary flavor here... It's completely annihilating every other part of the food... This is insane!

"H-Here, water!" Elna said as she passed me a glass of water, which I promptly gulped down. The spiciness, unfortunately, went nowhere. It was like there was an arsonist in my mouth and no fire station in sight. I munched on Arcia's butter mochi to try and dispel it.

Oh, there we go!

I downed a few more glasses of water, which made the pain finally go away. My tongue was still pretty numb, however.

“It wasn’t that bad...” Linne mumbled. She seemed more puzzled than anything as she reached for the curry daifuku and tossed some into her mouth.

...How? How can you do that?

“Linne... Remember what we said about being more careful when you cook?”

“Huh? But Mama Elze said it was tasty...”

“I mean...well, she would...”

Quun could only let out an exasperated sigh. Frankly, I didn’t know why she was talking down to her sister that way. Her tuna cake wasn’t exactly an inspired culinary choice either.

I didn’t make it visible in any way, but I was getting very tired of the weird and wacky foods that had been shoved down my throat.

“Here, Touya,” Yumina said as she came over and slipped a pill into my hand. I raised a questioning eyebrow in response.

“It’s stomach medicine. I got it from Flora in the alchemy lab. It should make you feel better.”

Man, you’re a great wife... Always so thoughtful...

I took the pill (alongside some water so my kids wouldn’t notice), then immediately breathed a sigh of relief. The medicine took immediate effect, which didn’t surprise me at all. Eccentricities aside, Flora was a reliable worker.

I considered mass producing some of her amazing medicine, but I didn’t want to take jobs away from the hardworking doctors and apothecaries at the guild. A better middle ground was providing them with the recipes. Some of them had rather complicated and rare ingredients, but they’d be able to hire adventurers to track those down for them.

“I’m glad we all had a good day.”

“Mhm, it’s nice to have family events like this every once in a while.”

It was a little out of season to be mochi malleting, but I was glad we’d done it. I could’ve maybe done without the weird “treats” from my kids, though. This all started thanks to Arcia going behind our backs, but it actually worked out in the end...

Just as we were finishing up for the day, Kousaka walked over to me with a confused expression on his face.

“My Lord... I have received a vast supply of buckwheat seeds from Tokugawa-sama. It would appear you’ve ordered a great deal...”

“Huh? I don’t remember ordering any buckwheat. I mean, I’m pretty sure we have a good supply of that alrea—” I suddenly paused and turned to glance at Arcia. I spied her slowly sneaking out of the room, sweat beading at her brow.

Lu quickly grabbed the girl by her collar.

“...Arcia, did you order buckwheat as well?”

“W-Well, I was interested in making different kinds of soba noodles, so... I mean, I thought we could experiment with different sauces too!”

“I’m glad you’re so eager to learn, Arcia...but did you learn nothing from my talk about public and private funds?!” Lu started raging as she dragged her daughter away for another stern talking to.

Guess we’ll have to hold a soba festival sometime.

With that in mind, I drew out some personal funds and paid Kousaka for the crop of buckwheat seeds.



Chapter III: Life Is a Circus

A beautiful melody echoed through the room. The fingers responsible for it traced along the piano keys, tapping them with a gentle rhythm.

Grande valse brillante in E-flat major. It was one of the many waltzes composed by Chopin, as well as one of his most famous alongside the Minute Waltz. Though it was composed when Chopin was quite young, it was a very charming piece with all the hallmarks of his later works.

The one sitting at the piano, playing it with such ease, was none other than Yoshino, my daughter with Sakura. Yoshino wasn't just a talented singer, but apparently, she had a penchant for instruments too. She was far more talented than me, that was for sure. This particular composition was especially hard for someone as young as her to play, since her hands were pretty small. And yet, Yoshino continued completely undeterred, playing the whole thing through to the end. She then stood up and took a little bow.

Everyone in the room burst into a round of applause, so I made sure to be extra enthusiastic in my clapping.

That's my girl!

"That was lovely... You're amazing, Yoshino."

"Hee hee hee... Thank you, mommy..." Yoshino said as she gave Sakura a big hug.

Hey, I'm right here... Where's my hug?

"Yoshino's performance magic is pretty great."

"Performance magic?" I asked. I didn't quite understand what Frei meant.

Yoshino saw my confusion, prompting her to open up some kind of app on her smartphone. Her phone lit up and projected an object outward. It was like a holographic keyboard just floating in the air in front of me.

“The keys activate different spells. It’s similar to how mommy’s singing magic works. Different songs create different effects.”

“Amazing... Where’d you get this keyboard?”

“Uncle Sousuke gave it to me.”

At that very moment, Sousuke appeared out of thin air, strumming a lute as if to announce his arrival.

Man...did he hear his name or something? So wait, this thing was made by the god of music? Doesn't that make it a divine vessel? Huh? Wait, no there's no divinity in it...? Guess not, then. He probably gave it to her in the future...but that makes me wonder... Do gods age the same as mortals? Do they exist in different times and timelines at the same time? Have they transcended time itself? Or are they experiencing it in the same way I am...? I should ask about it, maybe.

As I pondered that rather serious matter, Yoshino fiddled with her app again and this time a holographic flute popped out of her phone.

“There are lots of different instruments, see?”

“Oh... So you can adapt to the situation, kinda like how Frei has different weapons, huh?”

Does that mean she has the god of music's blessing, though? He's not exactly a fighter, but he's not normal...so maybe he's enhancing her power somehow?

“I prefer playing for recreation rather than combat. When I play my songs, mommy sings along and everyone smiles. That’s the best.”

Yeah, I guess that's your main strength. I bet if we recorded your stuff and sold the CDs, they'd fly right off the shelves.

“Daddy! Play music with me!”

“Uh, sure... But could we do a simple song?”

...I can't exactly keep up with you on something crazy.

We held a mini-concert shortly after that, with me and Yoshino playing instruments and Sakura singing a ton of songs. It was loads of fun, but I got so caught up trying not to make any mistakes that I was mentally exhausted by the end of it.

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Having six kids around made for a lively time. They were ostensibly children related to me and my family, so they were allowed to stay in the castle without arousing too much suspicion. And they were pretty accustomed to living here already, given that they'd grown up here in the future. It was their home, after all. They weren't just staying at a stranger's place. And as such, they basically came and went as they pleased. Quun was usually up in Babylon, while Frei could be found in the training field with the soldiers every morning. Their presence had quickly become a part of daily castle life.

“...Like this?”

“Mhm, like that. Then move on to the next part...”

Linze and Elna were knitting together in the reception room.



Elze and Linne were both sparring with each other on the training grounds. It was a little funny seeing the girls hang out with each other's daughter, since they almost looked like they were the actual mothers themselves...but it felt natural, so nobody seemed to mind. They just happened to have similar personalities.

Arcia was hard at work in the kitchen, trying out all kinds of new recipes. Occasionally, she went out to hunt with Karina, saying something about wanting to get a more natural feel for the ingredients by gathering them directly.

Yoshino often headed out to various places via **[Teleport]**, which was a bit concerning. To stem any anxiety I had relating to that, I told Luli to go with her as a chaperone and stipulated that she had to ask permission before going to any specific foreign nations. Also, she had to come home before nightfall. If she caused an international incident, it'd be a real pain in the ass. I once complained to Kousaka about her wanton use of transportation magic, but he simply laughed at me and said something about finally knowing how it felt... I felt a little bad after that, honestly.

I headed up to Babylon's research laboratory, since I'd been called up. The Fishman corpse had finally been analyzed, so they wanted to tell me what was going on with it.

I entered the lab and found Tica standing alongside Flora. They were both looking over a capsule pod where the dead Fishman was floating in suspended animation.

"I'll be blunt. This is a human."

"What?"

I couldn't understand what Tica meant... How could this thing be a human? He was obviously some kind of a fish monster.

“He was originally a human... The base body, at least. Then something must have happened that changed him from the inside, creating a Chimera of sorts.”

“A Chimera?”

Flora’s words confused me... I understood what she was saying, but it made little sense.

“I’ve heard of Chimeras before, but...”

“If you’re thinking of the Chimera that’s part lion, part goat, and part snake, then put that out of your mind. This is another matter entirely.”

“What’s important here is that this creature is a half-fish, half-human creature created by merging physiological elements together.”

...So it’s a whole new lifeform, basically? Who the hell made it?

The source of the transformation could’ve been the blue crystal I found embedded in the Fishman.

The power of the wicked god was clearly at play either way, which meant they were related to the wicked devout.

“So, why did the people who got bit turn into Fishmen?”

“It was a curse, though the only ones capable of transmitting it are those with the crystals embedded in their bodies.”

*Hm... So it can’t spread exponentially, basically. But if there’s more out there, I doubt Elna and I alone are gonna be enough to help. I should probably prepare some kind of item enchanted with **[Recovery]** in case of an outbreak.*

“But why would they even attack?”

“If I had to guess, the purpose is probably to cause fear, anxiety, and panic through the transmission of the curse.”

...Yeah, that sounds sensible. The wicked god used negative emotions to empower itself, but not everyone overtly shows them all the time. As far as methods to bring them out are concerned, the looming threat of a curse is pretty genius. The fear of the unknown, the anxiety of being bitten, the panic setting in once you know your fate is sealed. It's like a chain reaction of bad vibes that can even spread to those who aren't directly affected by the curse. Like if someone close to you gets infected, you could get scared for them or fearful that you might be next. Maybe these guys are trying to bring back the wicked god by using mass negative thoughts and emotions or something?

"By the way, ahhh...Master... I... I did good, didn't I? Mhhh..."

"Uh...yeah? Why...?" I asked as I narrowed my eyes at Tica, who was suddenly fishing for some kind of praise.

"Mmmh... Then you should reward me, Master! Ahhh! You should let me strip down naked with your daughters and cuddle with them all night under the covers! Please! Ahhh! Please!"

"Absolutely not! What the hell is wrong with you?!"

How the hell can you say that with a straight face?! You good-for-nothing, child-loving freak!

"Whyyyy? I'm the only one who doesn't get to see your kidsss! It's... Nh! Nooo faiiir!"

"Obviously you're not allowed! I don't want any of them developing early life trauma from meeting you!"

"I'll treat them gently!"

"You're not allowed to leave the research laboratory. Ever."

"Mean!"

There's nothing mean about this. You're way worse than mean. It's my job as a parent to keep my kids safe, so I definitely can't let a freak like you near them.

I left Tica, who was now whining and screaming at me, behind and headed to Babylon's workshop.

Hopefully Quun's there, and ideally not making anything too weird.

I entered the workshop and saw Quun riding something strange. It wasn't exactly foreign to me, since I recognized it as the Dvergr excavation machine developed by the dwarves...but this one was far smaller in size. It was more compact. The head and chest were gone, replaced by an open seat, and the magic motor was on the back. It also had two short, stubby arms on either side of it. Honestly, it kind of resembled a power suit, but since Quun wasn't technically wearing it, it was more of a vehicle. She was using it to stack a bunch of blocks that were nearby.

"What's this?"

"Oh, this is a prototype construction vehicle. I was thinking I could combine Frame Gear technology with Golem technology to create a smaller tool," Doc Babylon came over grinning as she explained what I was looking at.

...So you're making my daughter your guinea pig?

"I call it the Arm Gear. It was originally just meant to be something for Quun to play with, but it has some good applications. Why, we could weaponize them to form an entire mechanized division."

"...Could you not give playthings like this to my kid without asking first?"

...This isn't a toy, not by a long shot. Jeez... I need to keep a closer eye on things up here, clearly.

"F-Father! Look at this! Isn't it amazing?!"

"Uhhh, it's amazing all right. Did you tinker with it?"

"Sure did! Hee hee!"

Dammit... She's smiling so wide! There's no way I could take this from her now!

I turned back to Doc Babylon, who was grinning right at me.

"Typical daddy. Can't help but dote on your little girl, can you? Ah, how fatherhood changes a man..."

"Shut up..." I grumbled. I couldn't exactly say anything else, since she was right... I did feel like I was spoiling Quun a bit, but she seemed to have things under control.

She's cute! It's not my fault! How could any dad resist?!

Just as I was fretting about my own weakness, Luli and Yoshino appeared in front of me.

"Oh, Yoshino...you scared me! Don't just pop in with **[Teleport]** like that!"

"Daddy, look! I found something amazing! It's a syrcus! A syrcus!" Yoshino exclaimed. She didn't seem interested in listening to my lecture. She was far more interested in getting hyped over whatever it was she'd come to tell me about.

...What's a syrcus, though?

"Luli?"

"She means a circus, my lord."

I was glad to have the Dragon there or else I might've been confused a while longer.

A circus? So what, there's a traveling circus in town? Like a traveling troupe or something?

I'd seen a circus in Belfast's castle town once before, though I'd never actually attended the show or anything. From what I heard, they were a little different from the circuses in my own world. They had different acts like theatrics, singing, and dancing. They didn't

have stuff like magicians, probably because of how common magic was in this world.

“So, uh, what’s this about a circus?”

“It looks awesome! Here, let’s go see it! I got a flyer!” Yoshino excitedly said as she held a flyer out to me.

Let’s see...

The flyer read ‘Cheering World Circus! A traveling troupe shrouded in illusion, mystery, and excitement! We’re finally coming to Brunhild!’

...Cheering World Circus? Like they’re so good the whole world cheers for them or something? I’ve never heard of them.

“Oh? A circus is coming? That sounds interesting,” Quun said, seeming fascinated enough to lean over us in the Arm Gear.

“Right, Quun? Let’s go!”

A circus, huh? I’ve never been to one, so I’m kinda curious. I could invite them to the castle, but I bet it’d be better to go out and watch with the rest of the public. Hey, maybe it could be a nice day out for me, my wives, and the kids.

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“The circus? That’s interesting...” Yumina muttered as she looked over the flyer that Yoshino had picked up. Apparently, all my wives were interested.

“Have you ever been to the circus, Yumina?”

“Only once. There was a performance at the castle back in Belfast. I enjoyed the variety, I must say!”

Wow! Invited to perform at the castle? That’s definitely something you’d expect of royals, I guess.

The king of Belfast was pretty fond of stuff like that, so it made sense. He was a huge theater fanatic.

Leen, who'd simply been listening thus far, spoke up and said, "I saw something similar once in Mismede when I accompanied the beastking. It was an interesting act. The fellow threw various knives and axes into the air and twirled them around."

Ahhh, juggling. Knives are one thing, but axes? Sounds hardcore.

"It seems there's a play at this circus too. I hope it's a romantic one. I love those."

"I'm interested in this act here called Superhuman Strongman Weightlifting. Think they'd let me join in on the fun?"

Linze and Elze excitedly chattered as they looked over the flyer.

...Please don't jump in from the audience and join the show. I'd feel bad for the poor weightlifters.

If Elze used **[Boost]**, she'd definitely be able to put any lifter to shame. Hell, I had a feeling she'd be able to lift a ton at this point even without it.

...Isn't it kinda funny seeing them marvel all over these acts when we can do all this stuff? Like, they're getting excited over tightrope and ball-balancing, but I'm pretty sure that's mundane to us... Hopefully the kids don't find it boring, given what they're capable of.

As Linze mentioned, there'd also be a play. Plus, there was to be dancing, singing, and some other dramatic stuff.

Wonder if they'll do a musical. I love those. Oh...they have a contortionist. I don't think any of us can do THAT.

"Perhaps we could invite them to the castle?"

"No, I don't think we should keep them for the full day. The whole town should get to enjoy the show," Lu replied. She was right. It'd be easier for everyone if we went out to see them. I could just use **[Mirage]** to keep us incognito.

Kousaka told me that the circus was setting up its tent in an open area south of the town's central square. I had to approve it, so I knew exactly where it was.

"Have you kids been to the circus before?"

"We have not, no. We haven't even been to the theater. Though you've shown us plenty of movies and anime, father," Frei answered.

Hm? Not even the theater? Why?

"Ha ha... Most of the popular plays in the future are about you, father. You get embarrassed, so you refuse to take us."

Oh, that makes sense— Wait, what?!

Quun laughed as I froze up.

They're about me?! Is this gonna be like that one play I saw in Refreese that was about me as well? Please no!

"Oh, I actually saw one of those plays in secret... It's the story of how father and mother came to meet each other... I believe it was called *Chronicles of the Hero Tooya Episode IV: A New Rebellion*."

Both Lu and I gasped in confusion as we processed Arcia's words.

...A new rebellion? Is that about the coup in the Regulus Empire when I met Lu for the first time?!

"I really liked the scene where you challenged the enemy leader to a duel and defeated him with your Ultra Tooya Slasher Attack. It was rather inspired, father!"

...That's not how I remember it going down, but I guess adapting the whole stinky Slime torture sequence probably isn't as marketable. But still, gimme a break! Changing stuff like that goes beyond the realm of dramatization, doesn't it? What are you future people writing about my life?! Well, I definitely understand why my future self doesn't take my kids out to see shows if they're all like that...

"I want to see that show..."

“No, Lu! No! It’s made up! It’s not our actual story! Remember the real version!” I roared in an attempt to convince Lu not to take an interest. However, I could tell it hadn’t worked.

Ugh... Just because they put a legal disclaimer up before the start of the story, they think they can get away with writing anything?! What’s wrong with these maniacs?! Maybe I really should change the future... Dammit!

I soon found out that *The Chronicles of the Hero Tooya* had nine episodes in total, which made me scream.

◇ ◇ ◇

News of the incoming circus spread through Brunhild fairly quickly. According to Kougyoku, all the children of the town were unbelievably excited by the sight of the tent being set up.

Those who didn’t live in Brunhild found everything here fascinating, but the people who did probably considered it a part of daily life. Therefore, the sight of Frame Gears training in one of our fields was probably far less interesting than a circus rolling into town.

“Hey, hey! Dad! When are we going to the circus? It starts tomorrow, doesn’t it?!”

“Calm down, I bought tickets already. They were sold out for the first showing, but I got us tickets for the second day.”

“Whaaat?! Not tomorrow?!” Linne booed and frowned, but it wasn’t like her complaining would change anything.

You could reserve seats at the circus, or you could go there on the night and get tickets then. The reserved tickets had more legroom and got you access to a better area of the tent, so I wanted those. Reserved tickets were sold out for the first day, and I didn’t want to abuse my power to kick some excited townsfolk out of their spot. I wanted this to be an experience for all of Brunhild to enjoy, so I gave up and simply booked spots for the second day instead.

I bought a total of ten tickets for me and my wives, then six tickets for our kids. We also got some tickets for Ende's family, bringing the grand total to twenty-one tickets.

There were only sixty reserved spots to begin with, so we ended up buying a third of the seating area... Plus, it was expensive.

"I can't wait, mom!"

"Mhm, I can't wait either...but don't forget you need to study today, dear."

"Aww..." Linne grumbled a little as she went back to the textbook at her desk, but she was still smiling.

Educating our kids was important, even if they were stuck in the past. I didn't want to send them back to the future only to find their academic abilities weren't up to par. Yoshino and Linne found it the hardest to concentrate. Quun was a natural genius, while Arcia and Elna both tried really hard so their grades were great. What surprised me the most, however, was that Frei was remarkably gifted as an academic. I figured she wouldn't be as scholarly-minded, since she was a weapon nut like King Felsen, so it was a pleasant surprise.

Frei, who was in the middle of cleaning one of her weapons, suddenly looked up and asked, "...Was someone thinking something rude about me?"

"It's just your imagination."

...Damn, she's sharp. Guess that's my daughter for you. Or wait, maybe she gets that from her mother?

"When watching a show, it's best to eat something you can hold in one hand, like a sandwich or a rice ball."

"I see... You can handle that, mother. I'll work on smaller bite-sized things that we can have as snacks."

Arcia and Lu were busy prepping lunch boxes. They were planning to make stuff for everyone, including Ende's family...which made me wonder how many boxes it'd take.

"Touya, you're getting distracted," Yumina said as she gestured to the documents on my desk.

"Ack, my bad."

If I wanted to go to the circus with my family the day after tomorrow, I needed to handle all of my royal duties beforehand. Otherwise, Kousaka would get mad at me. One drawback to being the ruler of a country was that you couldn't delegate every part of managing it. Thankfully, I did have Yumina and Kousaka on hand to help me with a lot of things. Their assistance was hugely appreciated. Yumina was something of a secretary to me at this point, even.

In all honesty, Yumina and Kousaka were the ones truly running Brunhild...but I decided not to think about that.

As I was finishing up some of my paperwork and watching over my kids as they studied, Karen and Moroha came into the room and headed toward me.

"Got a minute, Touya?"

"What's up?"

Karen gestured to follow her, so I got up and went with them.

Huh? What's going on?

Moroha leaned in and began speaking in a quiet voice, whispering, "It's about the circus. I figured I'd better warn you in advance. There'll be gods in it."

"Huh?"

Gods in the circus? What's that supposed to mean?

Karen sighed, probably due to my visible confusion.

“You’re so slow in the head, you know? We’re saying that some of the gods who came down to this world are performers in that circus, you know?”

“What?!” I exclaimed, completely dumbfounded by Karen’s words.

You mean the gods who came down for my wedding?! They’re in the circus?! I know we’ve accounted for Granny Tokie, but the others went around the world to do their own thing, right?

If I remembered right, the gods who’d come down for my wedding were the god of strength, the god of crafting, the god of puppetry, the god of theater, the god of industry, the god of wandering, the god of glasses, the goddess of gemstones, the goddess of flowers, and the goddess of dance.

“There’s three of them. The god of strength, the goddess of dance, and the god of theater.”

“Three?!”

Three of them?! Just how blessed is this circus?! No wonder the world supposedly cheers for them!

“Luckily, they’re not using any of their powers. They’re acting in the capacity of their human alter egos. That’s why it took us so long to notice.”

Though they were in human form, my sisters and the other gods could use their divinity. If they used it, then any other divine lifeforms would be able to pinpoint their location. But if they didn’t use it, they couldn’t be tracked.

“This is gonna be a crazy circus, then.”

“I don’t think they’ll take it beyond human limits, you know? But they are extremely capable...”

...I don't believe you. You guys see human limits way more flexibly than anyone else! You act like humans with thousands of years of training and expertise! That's still inhuman!

"But why Brunhild?"

"I don't think it has much meaning, you know? Circuses travel all over, so they're probably just stopping here randomly."

Hm... Guess if they were going from Belfast to Regulus, it'd be a logical pit stop. So wait, it's just a coincidence? I guess if the kids weren't here, I probably wouldn't have paid any attention to it... But the goddess of dance, the god of theater, and the god of strength are all gonna be here...

I'd met the god of strength before when I visited the Pantheon Temple. He was insanely powerful...and most likely their strongman, which meant there was no way Elze could beat him.

The god of theater was, uh...feminine? He was male, or at least I figured he was. Gods probably didn't have a concept of binary gender, but it was just easier for me to impose my standards on them.

As for the goddess of dance, well...she wasn't very memorable.

"We're gonna go see them tonight. Want to come, Touya?"

"...Do I have to?"

"No, you don't. But this world's under your custody, and they are technically visitors. It might be good to check in on them and see that all's well, right? Could prevent any issues."

"Ugh..."

As annoying as it was, Moroha had a point. I wanted to just believe they were behaving, but I had to make sure. Even if God Almighty had told them not to cause any trouble, their concept of trouble was on a different level than regular people. Checking on them before

the first show was the right thing to do. Besides, Karen and Moroha had come down to the mortal realm to support me, so this fell under that category too.

“All right. I’ll come with you after I’m done with work, so wait for me.”

“Got it.”

I finished talking with my sisters and returned to my desk.

Well, can’t exactly tell the kids I’m going to the circus without them, so I’ll have to keep them in the dark about this.

I quietly resolved to sneak out of the castle later.

Gods performing in a circus, though? That sounds insane!

◇ ◇ ◇

When the kids were safely tucked into bed, my sisters and I headed to the big circus tent in the southern square. It’d already been put up in its entirety, so the massive construct loomed in the darkness and gently fluttered in the breeze.

I made myself known to the guards, who let me in without an issue. The tent was more spacious on the inside than I’d expected. The stage was set, the audience seating was all arranged, and a few performers seemed to be practicing various acrobatics tricks. I watched them for a few moments and was amazed to see one of them do a full spin in midair on a bicycle. I’d never seen anyone do that before.

“Let’s see... Oh, there he is,” Karen said as she pointed over at a part of the stage. There was a muscular-looking man there doing a set of push-ups...with a massive boulder on his back.

H-He’s doing push-ups with just his thumbs?! What the hell?!

There was no doubt about it. He had to be the god of strength. He was wearing the same toga I'd seen him in the first time we'd met.

"Good evening, Strength God."

"Ah, the Love Goddess."

The hulking brute of a man spoke without stopping his exercise. He hadn't even broken a sweat. Slowly, he raised himself upward, shifting the rock off his back and rising to his full height. He was as big as ever, standing over a whopping two meters tall. Even though he was just standing, his muscles were rippling and twitching as if to establish dominance. I personally found it a bit creepy.

"You're here too, Sword Goddess? Oh, and the newbie."

"Hey there. Been a while since the wedding," I said as I subconsciously reached my hand out to shake with him. Though, I quickly reconsidered. Something told me that if he'd grabbed my hand, I'd probably never be able to use it again.

"My, there are some familiar faces here."

"Ah, the god of theater and goddess of dance. Sorry for butting in like this."

I turned at the sound of a shrill voice to see a dark-skinned woman and a thin-looking man behind us. The man was pretty tall, though not quite as tall as the god of strength. His hair was blond and sticking up, giving him a kind of punk rock vibe. But he also had a kind of feminine air to him, and compared to the bastion of masculinity right next to us, he came up lacking. He was the god of theater, and didn't look much different from how he did at the wedding.

The woman had darker skin, shortish black hair, and green eyes that glimmered like jewels. She was the goddess of dance. She wore a piece of cloth like a tube top, as well as puffy white pants that

reminded me of clothing from the Middle East. She also had gold and silver bangles around her wrists and ankles.

“Well heeey, Touya darling. How are you?”

“Oh, uh, fine. Hope you guys are well!”

Hm... The god of theater's definitely similar to Kokuyou. Not that I have a problem with that or anything... Though having him call me darling and stuff is a little funny... He's supposed to be my higher-up in the god hierarchy, so it's a little inappropriate, maybe? Well, whatever.

“You seem well, Dance Goddess.”

“...Mmm.”

I couldn't read her expression at all. It was always so neutral. Still, she didn't seem to be in a bad mood.

“Touya, darling. ‘Dance Goddess’ won't do when we're down here! She's Prima, dear. And I'm Teatro! And the god of strength over there is Power.”

Prima? Like from Prima Ballerina? I think Prima means best, or something. And Teatro as in theater, I guess... Power's pretty self-explanatory.

“Don't just introduce me like that, Teatro. My name isn't just Power. It's Full Power.”

“Oh, right...”

I didn't bother thinking too hard about the god of strength's naming sense. I imagined giving themselves mortal identities had about as much thought put into it as naming a game character. Part of me was thankful none of them had just keymashed and called themselves fhafshfsafjh or something of the sort.

“So, why're you guys in the circus?”

“Mmm... Y’can’t eat down here if you don’t got money. We don’t have to eat to live or anything, but we do wanna enjoy our lives. One day, the leader of the troupe showed up and we saw a chance. Now I can flex my muscles, travel the world, and earn a little pocket change along the way! Sweet gig if you ask me.”

But couldn’t a guy as strong as this make it as an adventurer? Or is there a difference between being strong and being able to fight? Or...maybe he just wants an excuse to flex and show off? Yeah, that’s probably it.

“I definitely want to show off, darling. It’s nice to spread our performances around the world and see the smiles on everyone’s faces! Not to mention seeing all kinds of wonderful sights and eating all manner of fascinating meals.”

Prima nodded along with Teatro’s words.

It was true that the nomadic nature of the circus had plenty of perks... But they were gods, so I was sure they could just warp around if they needed it. That’d probably take some of the fun out of traveling, though, and the whole point of them being down here was to have an authentic human experience.

“So what, are you here to meet the troupe leader?”

“Oh, no. No need to do that today. I’m coming to see the performance with my family later, so I figured I’d say hi to you guys beforehand... Felt right to give you some warning, you guys being more experienced than me and all.”

“More experienced? Darling, I daresay you’re more experienced than any of us when it comes to being mortal,” Teatro said as he laughed softly.

Yeah, but I’m still basically a baby god... It’s better to pay respects than not.

“Don’t worry. We’re not gonna cause any trouble. God Almighty gave us pretty strict orders to behave, and we don’t wanna make the other gods lose their chance to come down because of our screwups.”

“Yeah, everyone in the divine realm would be real mad at us if that happened. Gosh, how scary!”

This world was meant to be a vacation spot for the gods, but it hadn’t formally opened yet. The gods down here were basically testing out the idea, and thankfully, they’d been well-behaved so far. They weren’t rushing down too quickly either, which was nice...though that did surprise me. In a lot of Earth mythology, the gods just kind of came down and did whatever they felt like.

“Will the other gods be coming to watch the show?”

“I think they can, you know? But Granny Tokie, the goddess of Space-time, can’t make it. The god of agriculture and the others are coming, you know? Oh, and you should have my ticket!”

“I certainly have, dear. We’ll be sure to put on a good show!”
Theatro smiled as he said that and handed a ticket over to Karen.

Damn, I should’ve asked for free tickets too. Would’ve been good to know about this in advance.

“I’d love to call in the god of music, actually. Don’t you think he’d work great with Prima?”

“...Mmm. Could work...”

*A collaboration between two gods? I bet it’d come out crazy...
Guess I can have Karen ask Sousuke about it later.*

“I’d love to have him do the music for my play as well. How fun!”

“...What play, by the way? It’s not gonna be about me, is it? I’ve had my fill of that...” I raised a concern of mine with Theatro. It’d been worrying me for a bit.

“No, darling! Not at all! It’s a story called *Royal Court Ruckus*. It’ll have laughter, tears, and drama in equal measure! It’s one designed to appeal primarily to younger audiences.”

I’d never heard of that story, but I was just glad to hear it wasn’t related to my adventures at all.

“I hope you and your family enjoy the show when you come to watch! I’ll be sure to put my heart and soul into it!”

“Best of luck...”

Maybe don’t go too hard with it? You’re still a god, so I don’t really want you to go all-out in my country.

I left the tent with a small feeling of relief in my heart, though I still felt rather anxious. I just had to hope the performance would be okay.

◇ ◇ ◇

It was the day of the show. Even though it was early, the kids wanted to hurry to the venue.

I’d never seen so many of Brunhild’s citizens in the same place before... I didn’t even know Brunhild HAD this many people. Upon seeing all of them, I was gladder than ever that we had our **[Mirage]** badges. We would’ve totally stood out.

We followed the rules and lined up, handing in our tickets and entering when our turn came up.

“Oh yeah, kids. Make sure to turn your phones off. It’d be bad if they rang during the show.”

“Okaaay!” Elna, Linne, and Allis all cheerily answered.

Everyone turned off their phones. I briefly considered just setting mine to vibrate, but the buzzing would probably be annoying if it was

a quiet moment of the show. Plus, the screen would definitely glow in the dark.

Everyone was utterly amazed at how big the tent was on the inside. I wasn't so surprised, since I'd come here beforehand to check the place out with my sisters.

All the Brunhild gods were here to watch the show as well, with the exception of Sousuke. He was going to be part of the performance itself, after all.

"Our seats are over there." Linze checked our tickets, then gestured to an empty area in the stalls. The reserved seats were in a special raised seating area directly in front of the stage.

It was a comfy-looking area with several large seats. There was even a handrail surrounding the raised section and a countertop in front of the chairs. The flooring in that section looked to be lined with a carpet soft enough that you could probably walk on it barefoot.

Wow, this seems pretty fancy... I think this spot might actually be the best in the place, even.

"Father! Father! Sit here!" Arcia yelled over to me, grinning wide and patting the seat next to her.

Before I could even move, however, Lu sat her butt right down on it.

"Wh—? Mother?! No fair!"

"You can sit next to me, Touya. I don't mind being a partition."

"Whaaat?! A partition?!" the girl yelled as she started to fuss with her mother. Though to any bystanders, it probably looked more like two sisters bickering.

I glanced over and saw Ende and his wives playing rock, paper, scissors...presumably for the right to sit next to Allis. Clearly, nobody had it easy this evening.

In the end, I decided to sit between Lu and Arcia, since I didn't want them snapping at each other all night. We all sat down and watched as the other seats filled up, crowding the venue.

Holy cow... I really didn't think it'd be so busy.

"Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls of Brunhild! It is my profound pleasure to welcome you all to the Completto Troupe's performance in Brunhild!" a fancy-looking, bearded man in a top hat said, using some kind of voice amplification magic to announce the beginning of the show.

The crowd erupted into applause.

Is he their leader or something? Hm...

The show was about to begin... I wondered what they had in store for us.

◇ ◇ ◇

The sound of drumbeats and trumpets blared through the tent as various circus performers appeared from each side of the stage. Some of them were even doing backflips... I was amazed they could do that without crashing into each other.

They soared through the air as if they were bounding on a trampoline. Each member of the troupe wore beautiful, billowing clothing. The stage erupted into color, making it look like an enormous flower in bloom.

"It's amazing that they can pull all that off without any mistakes."

"I bet they practiced a ton."

As I was chatting with Lu about the amazing motions on display in front of us, two men appeared. One threw apples into the air and began juggling, while the other stood off to the side. He seemed to be an assistant of some sort. The man to the side passed more

apples to the juggler until eventually, he was tossing a full ten of them into the air.

The audience let out loud applause, but the juggler wasn't done. His assistant threw a knife over to him, which he added to the juggling mix. He slowly swapped the apples out for knives until he was juggling ten of those too. I couldn't help but be amazed as the guy effortlessly juggled the knives. It was a real sight to behold.

Just when we thought it couldn't get any better, the juggler's assistant reached into a wooden box and produced a set of hatchets. He grinned wide as he waved them toward the audience.

He's gonna juggle those next?!

The audience began to murmur as the juggler started throwing the knives even higher into the air. He glanced over at his assistant as if to seek the perfect timing.

Everyone went silent. We were all on the edges of our seats. And then...the assistant passed the first hatchet. Then the next. And just as the apples were replaced by knives, the knives were replaced by hatchets. There weren't as many hatchets as knives, likely due to the weight, but it was incredible nonetheless.

The audience clapped even harder. How could we do anything else?

"W-Wait, is that...?"

"No way..."

The assistant began to set out several small logs that were about thirty centimeters long each. He lined them up in a row in front of the juggler. The juggler walked closer to the leftmost of the logs as a drumroll began to play in the background, indicating some kind of imminent action...

Cymbals crashed as the man threw an axe into the air. It came crashing back down, landing perfectly into one of the logs' centers.

Then, he began to slowly walk sideways, tossing axe after axe into each successive log. When he finally reached the last log, he gave a bow and thrust his empty arms outward. The crowd erupted into jubilant applause once more.

“Wow, talk about intense...”

“Yeah, I thought he’d mess up for sure...”

As Lu and I exchanged a few words amid our applause, the juggler left the stage and was replaced by a jolly-looking fellow on a bicycle.

The cycling man circled the stage, waving to the crowd. First he waved with one hand, and then he waved with both. He rode the bike without any hands on the bars at all.

I was just about to mention that I could do that when the man proceeded to stand up on the seat of his bike, steering the handlebars with one of his feet...which was something I definitely couldn’t do.

Three more cyclists appeared from the side of the stage, all of them crisscrossing as they circled the area. I was amazed none of them crashed. Then, a stagehand appeared with some kind of sloped platform.

Are they gonna jump?

One of the bikes raced full-speed toward the platform. It leaped into the air, did a full rotation, and then landed on the other side of the stage. The other three bikes followed suit, eliciting applause from the audience.

I was the one who’d introduced bicycles to this world, but these performers were using them as if they’d been riding them their whole lives. And they didn’t look like ordinary bikes either. I could see some clear modifications for shock absorption, which seemed pretty clever to me.

The four cyclists began circling the stage again, as more helpers came out with a length of rope. One man grabbed one end of the rope, while the other man grabbed the other end.

Oh, I see. They're gonna do some bike jump rope, huh? Neat.

"What are they doing now?"

"Hush and you'll see."

Arcia couldn't help but wonder what was about to happen as the men began to spin the rope around.

One of the men holding the rope muttered something under his breath, making the spinning jump rope suddenly ignite.

...Whoa, that's a step above what I was expecting.

One of the bicyclists rode into the middle and began to jump his bike over the rope as it swung under him.

...Yep, this is what I thought was gonna happen, just with less open flames. Wait, how are they even holding the rope if it's on fire?

I squinted and noticed the men were wearing some kind of thick gloves. They were probably flame retardant. The rope was probably made of special material as well.

All four of the cyclists were now jumping the rope and crisscrossing past each other at the same time. After a few dozen flaming jumps, they fanned out and ended that segment of their act.

After that, the cyclists did a few more acrobatic tricks before exiting the stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Are you ready for our resident strongman, Full Power, to show off his might?! Bear witness to the limits of the human body being utterly stretched beyond all reasonable measure!"

The top-hatted ringmaster cheered through his loudspeaker as the curtains in the middle of the stage opened up to reveal a massive muscular man. He stood flexing in various poses that emphasized his muscles.

...Yep, that's the god of strength.

At both of his sides stood beautiful women wearing bunny ears.

Wait, no...they're actually bunny beastmen, aren't they?

Their outfits reminded me of the traditional bunny girl attire, though. The only difference was they were wearing skirts rather than fully visible tights. I'd remembered showing an image of the bunny girl costume to Zanak when he wanted some new costume ideas... Presumably, he'd gone ahead and made it.

"Hmph!" Power grunted as he squatted down before taking the women into his arms and lifting them with relative ease.

The audience gasped in shock. He hadn't just lifted them with his arms, they were standing square in the palms of his hands. It was surely an incredible feat of strength to lift them like that, but it was an equally impressive feat of balance for the rabbit girls to stay standing and smiling without falling off.

"Hmph!"

Not content with simply lifting the girls, he then brought his arms even higher and held them over his head. The two bunny girls smiled and waved as they balanced atop his hands.

"Amazing!"

"Wow, he's so strong!"

Linne and Frei watched the act with amazed expressions.

*You two could probably do that too... Though I guess your hands are kinda small. If I use **[Boost]** or **[Power Rise]**, I bet I could do that, psh... Wait, why am I getting competitive about this?*

The two bunny girls were returned to the stage. They quickly scampered off to the side and lugged a huge kite shield onto the stage. It was enormous and sturdy, probably made out of some kind of dense metal.

Power gleefully took the kite shield from his beautiful assistants.

“Nhhh!”

My eyes went wide in shock as Power bent the kite shield with little effort.

“Hngh!”

Power then took the bent kite shield and bent it again! He’d folded the thing over twice. His strength really riled the crowd up, and he responded to their cheers by hefting the shield into the air and showing it off.

As he posed and flexed his muscles, a large cart was pulled onto the stage by dozens of staff members. It was a flat loading bed, the kind you’d attach to a cargo carriage. There weren’t any animals pulling it, however. It was just the cart. It was about the size of a truck bed and had enough space on it to carry a lot. It could probably have carried dozens of people at once, even.

The staffers who’d dragged it onto the stage all started filing toward it and standing on top of it. They bunched up until they were all on it, bringing the total count of occupants to at least twenty-four.

“No way...” I could hear some murmurs of disbelief from the audience. I too briefly had my doubts, but I came to the realization that if anyone could do this, it’d be him.

Just as we were expecting, Power placed his hands on the bottom of the fully loaded cart.

“Hnnngh!”

I stared in awe as he began lifting it off the stage and placed his arms flatter against the bottom of the surface. The full brunt of it now rested on Power’s shoulders, neck, and arms as he slowly brought himself fully under it.

A moment of silence hung over the room, and then there was a drumroll... With a sudden whoosh, Power stood up tall and lifted the stacked cart completely above his head as if he were lifting a weighted barbell.

“Amazing!”

“Impossible!”

“Such power!”

The audience erupted into jubilant applause. Even my children were completely enthralled by the performance.

If each of those people weighs an average of fifty kilos, then he’s lifting over a ton there... I’ve never seen anyone lift that much before... Pretty sure that’s nowhere near the limit of his power either... He might be able to get even stronger. Or maybe he’s actually going all-out for the performance... It’s hard to tell.

“Dad, he’s amazing!”

“I don’t think I could pull that off...even with **[Power Rise]** on.”

Linne, who was seated in front of me, seemed completely amazed. Even Frei, who was sitting next to her, was thoroughly impressed.

[Power Rise] and **[Boost]** were spells that bolstered the power of your muscles. A child using those spells wouldn’t be able to do as much as a powerful older man. Linne’s **[Gravity]** could definitely let

you cheat, though... She could easily reduce the weight of what she was lifting.

“Hngh!”

Power set down the cart and began to go through his series of flexes and poses once more.

...We’ve already seen that, man.

“Hngh!”

“Hah!”

“Hooah!”

Frei, Yoshino, and Linne all started making macho flexing poses like Power. I wasn’t really sure how to feel about that, since they weren’t exactly brawny enough to pull it off.

“Hm?”

The sound of drums suddenly filled the stage as Power walked off with the cart in tow. Band members filed to fill the spot he’d left behind. The rhythm of the drumbeat was slowly joined by trombones and trumpets until it all came together in a cohesive melody.

Oh, I know this one!

The curtain came up on the stage, revealing a full orchestra. I immediately recognized the principal drummer. It was Sousuke, the god of music.

After the intro died down, the saxophone began to play the main melody. It was a tune you could really dance to. The composition was a swing jazz song, and it happened to be one of my grandpa’s favorite melodies. The song had been featured in a Japanese movie about a group of teen girls who formed a jazz band together. The song was one of the most famous ever performed by the jazz musician everyone knew as the King of Swing.

As the band continued to play, circus performers came in from either side of the stage and began doing backflips and gymnastic acts to the beat.

It's an all-women act, and their clothes look culturally Arabic... They're all kinda dressed like they're from Mismede, come to think of it.

As far as their torsos went, they were only wearing fabric to cover their chests. Their lower bodies were adorned with baggy harem pants, but the material was partially see-through, allowing the audience to catch glimpses of their legs.

The dancing troupe lined up on the stage. The goddess of dance, Prima, stood in the middle of their row. The dancers began to move hypnotically to the beat of the music, eliciting cheers and whoops from the audience. I, of course, remained silent. I was surrounded by my wives, so there was no way I'd risk making a wrong turn here.

Their moves alternated between hard and soft, fast and slow, switching between flashy and subdued in seconds flat. It was the kind of dancing you couldn't take your eyes away from.

So this is the power of the goddess of dance... She didn't look all that expressive yesterday, but she's sure showing it now.

Her dancing troupe must've been made up of very talented women. Some danced in a way that matched Prima's motions, while others varied their dancing to complement her, creating a whirlpool of color on the stage. It was like witnessing a shifting metamorphosis of artistic expression.

Before long, the dance reached a feverish pitch and everyone in the tent was on their feet clapping to the rhythm. This performance was a collaboration between two gods, so it was no wonder that everyone had been completely enthralled.

We weren't an exception either. All my kids were clapping their hearts out. So were Ende and Ney. In that moment, I was reminded of just how scary the gods could be.

When the act finally came to an end, the audience gave a resounding standing ovation. Not a single person could remain silent after witnessing such a display. Some audience members were even weeping tears of joy. I couldn't blame them, since it wasn't every day you got the chance to see something like this.

"That was amazing, truly... I wish to sing on stage like that..."

"I want to sing there too!"

Sakura and Yoshino seemed the most excited about the performance out of anyone in my group. It was hard to get them to calm down.

The stagehands began moving things around again to prepare for the next act. Sousuke sat up on stage as they did their work, gracefully playing the piano as if to calm everyone in the tent.

...Wait, isn't that one of the castle's pianos?

The song being played by Sousuke and the backing band was the theme to a popular anime from Earth. It was a series about a master thief. The third one of his line, as I recalled. Sure, it was jazzed up a little, but I couldn't help but wonder why he'd chosen this song of all things. As the song rang out, I saw barrels and circular targets being set up along the edge of the stage.

What now? Knife throwing?

I was wrong. It was axe throwing. This circus sure seemed to have a thing for axes.

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"We hope you enjoyed the first half of the show! We'll take a brief intermission and prepare for the second half shortly. Please take the time you need."

Various people left the tent after the ringleader's announcement. I heard that some people had bought cheap tickets that only accounted for half of the show, so some of them moved to leave while others came in to take their place. Others left to use the restrooms or eat.

We decided now was as good a time as any to eat our food. Lu pulled out stacks of boxes and placed them on a nearby table. There was a lot more food than I was expecting!

"Feel free to grab whatever you like! We've got drinks too!"

"I've got plates for all of you as well!"

Lu and Arcia pulled the lids off the boxes, prompting our group to stare at the array with hungry eyes. There were all kinds of meals from all kinds of countries, so we certainly weren't hurting for variety.

"It looks great! I'm gonna get one of these—"

Before Linne could grab a rice ball, her mother grabbed her by the wrist.

"Hold on there, Linne. You have to wash your hands first, remember?"

"Oh, that's right..."

Linze conjured up a water orb in the air, which the kids all used to rinse their hands. I took out a few warm hand towels from **[Storage]**, letting everyone dry off.

"Let's eat!"

"Let's!"

With that, we all descended upon the selection of foods, taking whatever we wanted. Several of the boxes were completely emptied

in the blink of an eye. But that was to be expected. It was my family, Ende's family, and a few gods for good measure.

After clearing away the empty boxes, Lu tapped into her ring's **[Storage]** and pulled out a few more to replace them.

...How much did she make?

"Mmm, this stuff tastes wonderful, you know?"

"Nya ha ha ha! It'sch, hic, good to snack with a li'l drinky!"

Karen and the other gods seemed to be in high spirits as they grabbed all sorts of food.

...Wait, are you even allowed to drink alcohol here? I thought as I glanced at Suika's bottle of Eashenese booze, then nervously glanced around the area. I spotted a couple in the reserved section with some wine, so thankfully, it was probably okay.

"I must say, this show is incredible. Far beyond the performance I saw at Belfast Castle when I was younger," Yumina said. She was clearly taken in by the performance. The one she'd seen sounded fairly mundane in comparison.

"I really liked that strongman!"

"I was quite fond of the illusion magic they used in some of the acts."

"Oh, yeah, I really liked those illusions too."

Linne, Elna, and Allis were all discussing their favorite acts as they chowed down on some wrapped tofu.

...I can do illusion spells too, guys... It's not THAT awesome.

It was true that the specific illusions used in the show had been impressive, though. One part of the show made the entire tent feel like it had transformed into some kind of deep sea aquarium.

I wondered if that was some kind of Null spell...or maybe a magical artifact. Doc Babylon could probably make something like it.

“What happens in the next part of the show?”

“It’ll be a play, I believe. Something or other about a ruckus in a royal court, I think?” Leen answered Sue’s question as she skimmed over the programme.

Oh yeah, the play... The god of theater, Theatro, might be in that one, right? Or wait, is he just directing it? Don’t tell me he’s gonna play a princess or something... Well, I guess it’d work if the show’s a comedy?

I briefly tried to imagine Theatro all dolled up in a dress. I immediately stopped, however, as I didn’t want my kids to see something that scary.

“I’ll be looking forward to the play.”

“Same here. It’s been a while since I last saw one.”

Elna and Arcia smiled as they chatted. I felt a little bad for my kids, since my future self didn’t let them see plays often... Hopefully they enjoyed this one.

It’d be a play created by a literal god, so it had to be interesting at the very least... Hopefully... Of course, that depended on what the play was, as well as who was watching. If it were too adult-oriented or too political in nature, then it’d fly right over the heads of the kids. But Theatro had told me it’d be something kids would enjoy, so I just had to place my faith in him.

“Linze, do you know anything about this story?” I quietly whispered my question to Linze. Apparently, the play was fairly popular in this world, so I figured if anyone would know, it’d be her.

“From what I recall, it’s the tale of a village girl who works as a maid in the royal court. She goes through a lot of trouble there, but eventually, everything works out for her. It’s not a book, so I don’t know the full story or anything.”

Oh, I see... Maybe it'll be like Cinderella, then? A poor girl finding her prince? That'd be fun.

"I am looking forward to the show, I am!"

"I'm looking forward to it too!"

Yae and Frei cheered as they stuffed their cheeks full of rice balls. They were gluttonous as ever. Hilde could only watch the duo, her complexion pale.

Nearby, Ende had much the same expression as he watched Melle, Lycee, and Ney devour their own meals. Lu didn't seem to mind at all, however. In fact, she was already there in a flash, plopping down another set of food boxes for our hungriest companions. It was as if she'd predicted this from the very beginning.

Oh well... If they wanna eat, let 'em. I should enjoy some too.

I took a piece of fried chicken from my plate and chowed down.

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"What?! The letter's missing, you say?!"

"Forgive me, sir! Someone in the castle must have taken it..."

The king approached the prime minister, his expression grave. The letter the prime minister had lost was a love letter written from the king to the most beloved songstress in all the land. He'd planned to secretly deliver it, but had accidentally left it in the castle's reception room, where it had presumably been swept away by someone in the castle.

"If the queen finds it, we'll be done for! Done for, I say!"

"Oh no! Oh no indeed! My wife cannot find that letter! I'm much too young to die!"

The king stormed out of the room with the prime minister in tow, but in his haste, he accidentally bashed his knee against a nearby

table and stubbed his toe on a chair. The audience howled with laughter as the actor playing the king hopped around on one foot and screamed.

“If he’s so scared, why did he cheat on his wife to begin with?”

“That’s a good question...”

I could hear Quun and Frei muttering. I didn’t know why this scene had me feeling so nervous. I mean, it wasn’t like I had anything to hide... Maybe I just felt a kinship with the character, since we were both royals and all.

Hmm... Maybe my kids shouldn’t be watching this.

The play was indeed the story of a common girl who worked as a maid in the royal court. It was a slapstick comedy about the events that happened after she accidentally picked up a love letter that wasn’t meant to be seen. It had a wide cast of characters with wacky personalities. There was the lusty king who had a crush on the songstress, the snooty queen who butted into everyone’s business, the money-grubbing prime minister, the foolish knights, a clumsy head chef, and the vain chief maid. Each of the characters played off one another quite well.

All I could think about was how screwed this nation would be if it was real. There were a bunch of clowns in charge. And as I thought about the show, I turned my attention back to the stage. The king was laughing like a madman after reclaiming what he thought was his letter from the protagonist.

“Hurray! I’ve got it at last! Now let me just... Wait, what is this? This isn’t my letter at all! It’s someone’s tavern bill!”

“It must’ve been swapped with the letter, sir!”

“Auugh!” the king cried out in disbelief. The chef, who bumped into the protagonist by mistake, accidentally took the letter in place of their bar tab.

The people of the palace kept on wandering all over the place, resulting in the letter changing hands multiple times. The desperate situation only intensified, which meant bigger laughs from the audience.

“This sure is chaotic.”

“Yeah... It’s amazing how the characters are all dead serious, but the events make it work as a great comedy,” Lu murmured by my side as she watched the frenetic cast run around the stage.

Charlie Chaplin, regarded by many as the king of comedy, once said, “Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long shot.” I couldn’t help but agree.

“Oh, the prince!”

Yoshino’s comment brought my attention back to the stage, where I saw a golden-haired young man offer his hand to the pauper protagonist, who had apparently fallen over. He definitely looked very prince-like to me.

“Are you okay, my dear? Can you stand?”

“Y-Yes, I can!”

The charming prince took the girl by the hand and helped her up.

Wow, I’ve seen a lot of princes, but whoever’s playing this guy is selling it super well right now.

Most of the women in the audience, as well as a couple of the men, were practically swooning at his charismatic performance.

Thankfully, my wives weren’t so easily drawn in. They were used to being around royals.

But who's playing this guy? Wait...

I narrowed my eyes.

"What?!"

"Wh-What is it, father?"

"N-No, nothing... Forget it... Sorry..."

My exclamation shocked Arcia, so I promptly apologized. I had suddenly realized who I was looking at.

It's Theatro! He's playing the prince! Incredible! This guy really is the god of theater... He's encapsulating the role perfectly... He looks nothing like the gangly punk rocker he resembled last night... I know it's a play, but he really is coming off as a different person entirely. He's not just a character actor, he's a full-on chameleon!

The Theatro on stage was the very image of a fairytale prince. He exuded kindness, reliability, bravery, and virtue. I couldn't see him as anything other than the epitome of princeliness.

"He's pretty different from our prince..."

Yoshino's comment tore me out of my stupefied admiration.

...Our prince?

"Well yeah, our brother isn't that kind of person."

"He doesn't train much either... He's a little too casual if you ask me."

I couldn't help but lean in to hear what Quun and Frei were saying.

...Are they talking about my son?!

"He's a true prince to Allis, though."

"H-Huh?! I-I mean, he's cool, isn't he?! He's a really cool prince!"

Elna teased Allis a little bit. Her cheeks had gone red. It was pretty obvious she had a thing for my son.

I could feel Ende's glare boring into the back of my head.

...It's not my fault. I didn't do this!

"Hopefully Kuon shows up soon."

"Please, I bet he'll come as soon as he can. He loves being spoiled and doted on in the castle more than anything else."

"Kuon?!" I couldn't help but yell out in response to Linne and Arcia's exchange.

Linne looked back at me and put her hand over her mouth. She realized she'd messed up. Still, the name she'd accidentally revealed had shocked the hell out of me. After all, it was a name I was intimately familiar with.

Linze, who was seated next to Linne, leaned over and whispered, "Is something wrong, Touya?"

"N-No, it's just... Kuon... Kuon was my grandfather's name."

"Huh?!"

She seemed almost as startled by my confession as I was.

...So that's it, huh? I named my boy after my grandpa... Mochizuki Kuon... It's a good name. Yeah, of course it is. It's already a tried and tested name, after all. It was good enough for my grandpa.

The only thing I was worried about now was if my son would end up as insane as my grandpa. Names and natures often aligned, after all. He'd probably call himself Kuon Brunhild on paper for diplomatic reasons, though.

"If you don't follow the play, you'll miss the story, you know? Pay attention."

"Fine..."

I was about to ask more about my son, but Karen stopped me. She must've known my intentions...

I knew he was younger than Linne, my seventh kid...so that meant he was the eighth or ninth, which put him around five or six.

He's only a little boy, but he's out there all alone... I hope he's okay. I know the girls say he's a silver or gold adventurer already, but I can't help but worry.

I started thinking about my son so much that I found it hard to concentrate on the rest of the play.

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The royal capital of the Kingdom of Elfrau, Slanien, was in the eastern portion of the country. The small town of Zelezny, unfortunately, was quite a distance away from it. The town wasn't all that big, but it wasn't a tiny village either. It was something of a layover town, one that wasn't quite a city, but was still reasonably large. The land outside the town's walls was covered in falling snow, but the streets themselves were fairly clear of it. That was because the entire place was enchanted with wards that warmed the air.

Most towns in Elfrau were enchanted with such wards, allowing the citizens to brave the bitter cold. They still needed coats, however. Everyone who lived here was dressed for wintry weather. The only person who stood out was the young boy, who was maybe five or six years old, who dressed as if he was going out for a spring picnic.

His clothes looked particularly well tailored, making it plain that he was from a well-to-do family, but his clothing wasn't really suitable for the hostile, snowy environment. The people around him didn't say much, but they couldn't help but glance at him in confusion.

"Hey, young man. Aren't you cold?"

"Mhm. I'm cold," the boy replied. A curious store owner, who couldn't help but reach out, had called out to him.

"Why are you dressed like that, then?"

“Can’t help it. Anywhere here that sells clothes?”

“Huh? Just down the street over there.”

“I see. Thank you kindly, sir,” the boy said and bowed before toddling away. He spoke in such a refined and courteous manner that the store owner could only assume he was of some noble origin.

The boy walked down the street until he saw a signpost for an armor store. Perhaps that was the one the man had mentioned before? It seemed to be more of a store for battle garments rather than regular clothing, however.

The boy rang the doorbell and walked inside. He saw armor aplenty, with various helmets and greaves and chest plates. There was no shortage of thick coats, heavy cloaks, and cozy-looking snow boots too.

There were a few customers, but nobody was manning the counter. And so, the boy called out to who he assumed must be the owner.

“Excuse me, sir?”

“Oh, hey there. Nice outfit you got there, sonny.”

His clothing once again drew attention, reminding the boy that he was very out of place.

“I’d actually like some warmer clothing, but I’m out of money right now.”

“We can’t just give stuff out for free, kid. We’re a business, not a charity.”

“I’m well aware of that. Would this do in lieu of currency?” the boy asked as he took off his cufflinks and set them down on the countertop. The man at the counter looked over the cufflinks before his eyes went wide in shock.

“Holy crap, kid. Is this orichalcum?!”

“That it is. Even orichalcum in this small amount should fetch me thirty gold coins per cufflink, yes?”

The shopkeep immediately recognized the value of the metal that had been brought to him. Orichalcum was a mythical metal. It was rarely found on the market, and even buyers who worked directly for the state had a hard time finding it. The shopkeeper recognized this orichalcum as the very same kind of metal he’d had the good fortune of handling once when he was a young man. It was the real deal.

The boy had valued each cufflink at thirty gold coins, but the shopkeeper’s awe made it seem far more valuable than that. That was probably because melting down the cufflinks and applying even a thin layer of coating to a piece of armor would create a very profitable item he could sell.

“Yeah... You win, kid. None of our winter clothes are worth this much, but I really want these cuffs. Mind if I go get you some money from the store safe?”

“Sure. I’d like to purchase a few other items as well, please.”

“Gotcha. Take a look around until I get back, then. The stuff in the back row has magic enchantments,” the shopkeeper said as he headed over to sort out his finances.

The boy turned to look at the warm clothing corner. Most of the items for sale were for adults, but there were a few things in his size. Some adventurers took their kids out with them, so presumably, the selection here was for them. However, the main issue the boy had was that none of the clothes really suited his tastes.

“Hmm... I guess this coat works best... It can withstand extreme temperatures on both ends, making it perfectly climate-controlled. Though it resembles father’s coat perhaps a tad too much...”

The boy didn’t want to dress up like his dad, so he ended up opting for a similar coat that came in black instead.

“I bet Allis’ll like this. My sisters will just tell me my fashion sense is bad as ever, though...” the boy sighed as he remembered how often his siblings would tease him. He wondered if they’d arrived in this era yet. So long as they hadn’t lost their phones like he had, they’d be able to easily reach their parents.

“Now, how am I to get to Brunhild from here, I wonder...?”

He knew there was no magic train between Elfrau and Brunhild, not yet at least, so his only options were likely to go on foot or via carriage. The Snow Wolf he’d ridden to this town would’ve drawn too much attention, so he’d released it. At the very least, Regulus wasn’t too far from Elfrau. If he kept moving, he could maybe make it there in a month.

“...Well, no rush,” the boy mumbled as he decided to make it home eventually. He saw no need to panic. He didn’t have the luxury of teleportation magic like some of his siblings, so he was content to just go at his own pace.

“That’s the coat sorted out, but I’ll need gloves and boots for Elfrau’s harsher areas,” he said to himself as he picked up some relatively cheap-looking clothing to finish off his ensemble. They weren’t the best, but they’d do. If he could use the spell **[Warming]**, it’d have been less of a pressing issue, but the boy had no aptitude for Fire magic.

He and all his siblings had Null spells, but only four of them could use elemental spells alongside them. He didn’t have his phone, so he couldn’t trigger its **[Storage]** either. That meant he couldn’t access his backpack filled with all his stuff. And, unfortunately, this era was still prerevolution, which meant there weren’t storage cards being sold in every store.

His phone was locked and inaccessible to anyone other than him, so at least his things were safe...but that didn’t change the fact that

there were important things in there. Hopefully his father would be able to sort it out once he returned to Brunhild.

Once he'd chosen what he wanted, he waited for the shopkeeper to return.

"Picked out everything you want?"

"I have."

After deducting the cost of the clothing against the value of the cufflinks, the boy had a handful of silver remaining. He put them in a purse he'd just purchased. It was a simple horse skin bag, one that could be bound with a string. He tied it to his waist, put on the warmer clothing, and headed outside.

"That's better. The trip should be a lot easier now. Let's see, next I should..." before he finished speaking, the boy's stomach started to rumble as if to remind him of something important.

"Oh yeah, I'm hungry."

He hadn't eaten anything since he'd landed in this time period. His smartphone **[Storage]** had a few snacks in it, but he couldn't access that.

Fortunately, he had money now, so he began making his way to the town square to look for a bite to eat. But before he could do that, three men appeared from nowhere.

"Hey, kid. We saw you coming outta that shop with a pretty penny. Mind sharing?" the leader of the men, a young smirking man, said.

The boy looked a bit closer and recognized one of his aggressors as a customer from the store earlier. He must've been eavesdropping on the orichalcum transaction and set up this attack. The boy didn't think that was especially nice of him.

"Give us the purse, now. No need to get yourself hurt."

“No, I don’t think I will. I’ve no need to listen to common thieves,” the boy replied, seeming completely unintimidated. His indifference only served to enrage the men.

“Who’s a thief, huh?! You little brat!”

“What else would I call you? You’re the one demanding my money, are you not? Shall I call you a thug instead? Even a brat like myself can recognize you for what you are.”

“You little shit!” one of the men roared as he ran over and attempted to kick the boy.

“[Slip].”

“Whagh!”

The man slipped over and bashed his head into the stone pavement. He clutched at himself in agony as he rolled around on the floor, but the boy didn’t even so much as look his way.

“Tch! Don’t mess with us, kid!” another of the attackers exclaimed as he charged in, this time grabbing at the boy’s neck.

The boy simply placed his hand on the attacker’s arm and said,

“[Paralyze].”

“Gwugh?!”

The man’s arm seized up, and then his entire body fell forward. It then began to lightly twitch and spasm. Anyone could tell his muscles weren’t working properly. Neither of the men knew what had hit them.

“I’m not exactly the most proficient at combat, since my sisters see more of it than I do. Still, I can’t exactly let you do as you please with me, now can I?”

“Wh-What are you, brat?! What do you think you’re doing?!”

“Hm? What am I doing? Taking care of criminals, I’d say.”

The man who'd bashed his head earlier screamed at the boy, but he simply responded by crouching down and paralyzing him as well. Just like his friend, his body began to spasm before falling still.



The last of the men standing couldn't believe his eyes. This was meant to be a simple job, some easy money. They just had to scare a kid into handing his cash over, so why were his friends down for the count? Why was this kid so insanely strong?

"Hey, mister. Do you know if I'll get a cash reward for handing you in?"

"Ugh!"

"Ah..."

The young man turned tail and fled. He had a horrible feeling in the pit of his stomach. This brat wasn't just any brat. He was something more. He was something...wrong.

"You're not going anywhere."

"What?!"

The boy's right eye changed into a slightly murky, yellow-gold color. The moment that shining gaze cast itself upon the man...he froze in place.

He could breathe. He could move his eyes, just barely, but his body wouldn't move. His body wasn't paralyzed, though. He was still suspended in place, still frozen halfway through his running. Time had stopped for the man. It was as if he was trapped in suspended animation.

"...If I blink, you'll unfreeze, so let me **[Paralyze]** you."

"Ngh!" the man groaned as he fell to the ground. It had only taken a moment for three adults to be completely incapacitated by a boy who only seemed to be five or six.

"Now then...how shall I deal with these thieves?"

Typically, when dealing with criminals, it was a simple matter of hauling them to the local authorities. However, if he took these people to the local knights, he'd probably have to answer a bunch of questions. And if he told them his true identity, they wouldn't believe him at all. He was hungry too, so he had no time to waste on simple matters of criminal justice, which was why he settled on a compromise. The men hadn't been too violent, so he decided they could go free.

"But..." he mumbled as he dragged the three men over to the shade of a nearby tree and snatched up their purses. He didn't want to take their money for himself, but he did want to teach them a lesson.

"My, you have a nice bit of money here... Why would you try to take from me when you could've fed yourselves just fine?" the boy asked as he dumped out their purses into the street. Most of the coins were copper, but there were a few silvers as well.

The three men could only watch, screaming in silence, as their precious money was tossed off.

"Let's hope some good people find this money, eh? Perhaps they'll bring it to the knights and you can recover it later. Or maybe there won't be any left at all by the time your paralysis wears off, hm?" the little boy with the angelic face and the devilish eyes, Mochizuki Kuon, smiled wide.

It didn't matter what their motivations were. Thieves didn't deserve human rights or civil liberties. That was what his father and mothers had taught him. If his sisters were here, they'd have chastised him for going too easy on these men, even.

He took their armor and weapons for good measure, tossing them into the street as well.

Kuon's stomach rumbled. He was really, really hungry.

“Ah... It’ll no doubt pale in comparison to what Mother Lu can conjure up, but I hope I find something nice,” the boy said as he began to walk through the snowy town.

The three men were later rescued, mere moments before the cold claimed their lives. They shivered, shook, and cried about seeing a demon. But once the knights investigated them, their testimonies were deemed unreasonable and they were imprisoned on charges they’d been avoiding. And, of course, they never reclaimed a single coin they lost that day.



Chapter IV: Grandparents and Grandchildren

“Now then, a toast to our troupe’s success...”

“Cheers!” On Teatro’s command, the circus members all raised their glasses and cheered.

After they’d spent a week performing in Brunhild, we invited the troupe to the special entertainment room in our castle. Naturally, we prepared food and drink for them as well.

Power, Teatro, Prima, and all the other members of the circus were now making merry with one another. I didn’t think serving them alcohol in the afternoon would be a good idea, but I ended up allowing it, since it was a rare opportunity for them to unwind and all.

“G-Grand Duke, I really must thank you from the bottom of my heart... We all owe you a great debt...”

“Don’t worry about it. If anything, this is just how we’re thanking you for entertaining our citizens. We’d love to have you back here any time.”

The ringleader bowed to me, but I quickly cleared any concerns he might’ve had.

Power then raised his voice and said, “Hear that? It’s all good. So come and eat your fill, boss! Don’t be shy! It’d be a waste not to stuff yourself silly when the food’s all free!”

“C-Come now, Power... Don’t act so casually in royal company!”

Just as the ringleader started to panic about Power’s perceived rudeness, Teatro came sauntering over with a big smile on his face and said, “Don’t you worry about thaaat, bossman... In fact, our darling Touya here is actually family. We’re among friends.”

“Is...? Is that right?”

Technically, I guess... Guess it's fine so long as they don't claim we're siblings. But yeah, we're more or less relatives, so this is fine.

The ringleader was a little concerned with how casually Theatro was acting around me, but he eventually came to terms with it and went on to enjoy the drinks with his fellow performers.

Yumina and the rest of my wives were all present, along with Karen and the more godly members of my family, but my children weren't. I didn't think it was appropriate to have them come to a place where there'd be alcohol flowing freely.

The goddess of alcohol, however, was here...despite her childish looks.

“Nyaaa ha ha ha ha ha ha! Delicious! What'll I have necsht?!” Suika, the hellish creature she was, exclaimed as she chugged her booze like it was water... Apparently, she didn't realize this wasn't a celebration for her. By her side sat Prima, who casually swirled a glass of wine around in her hand.

Theatro walked over toward them, that smile still wide on his face, and said, “Seems you're all having fun, then. I never thought you'd be so happy down in the mortal realm.”

“And how are you enjoying your stay?”

“Oh, it's just fabulous, darling! I haven't taken a break in tens of thousands of years, so I'm making the most of it now! When I go back to the divine realm, I'm sure I'll be speaking of this trip for centuries.”

...You've been working for that long? That's pretty intense... Hell, maybe a little too intense. Then again, I guess gods don't really treat it like a job or anything. It's not like they get paid. It's more like the role they're here to fill, like a purpose.

“You should’ve brought your children, Touya darling. I’d have loved to have met them!”

“It’s a bit of a private function, so I didn’t want my kids running around bugging the staff. You’ll be able to see them when you guys leave.”

The troupe was going to spend the next day dismantling their tent, then they’d be leaving the day after. Their next stop was Belfast, apparently. I hoped that Yumina’s little brother would get to see the show... Though given he was only one, he’d hardly be able to appreciate it.

“How are you adjusting, by the by? It’s a big responsibility to care for a whole world, and you’re only a newcomer at that...”

“To be honest, it’s been pretty rough... Luckily, I’ve got Karen and the others backing me up, so I’m getting there.”

I didn’t really know what I was meant to be doing with this world. It was a lot easier to think about when there was a defined threat like the Phrase or the wicked god.

“If this world ends up lost, we’ll lose our prime vacation destination, darling. Make sure you do your best to keep it safe!”

“Yeah, I’ll try...”

Ugh... Don’t pressure me so hard!

“I can’t lie, darling. I’ve seen some strange things in my travels. You may well want to keep vigilant.”

“Strange things?”

“Vestiges of the wicked god, darling. I’m sure they’re up to something quite insidious... But that’s not my territory, now is it? I’m afraid my hands are quite tied.”

The wicked devout... Guess it makes sense that Theatro and the others wouldn't act against them even if they saw something weird. It's my mess to clean up, just like God Almighty told me.

"I'll be sure to let you know if I see anything particularly concerning in my travels, don't you worry about that!" Theatro exclaimed as he spun on his heel and sauntered off toward his colleagues, offering me a flowery little wave as he went on his way.

The stolen Ark... The Fishmen on that island... The wicked devout are definitely up to something bad here...but what's their endgame? Are they trying to resurrect the wicked god? Are they trying to birth a new one? Whatever their plan is, I'm not gonna let them disturb the peace of this world, not when it's finally coming together. I'll have to destroy them.

There wasn't exactly much I could do until I had a better idea of their movements, however.

"Touya..."

"Touya?"

I was snapped out of my postulating by the sudden arrival of Elze and Linze, who'd shown up with smiles on their faces.

"Oh, hey, you two. Is the party going okay?"

"Oh, it's going great. Way easier than dealing with nobles. Wish they were all like this."

Elze wasn't very fond of the parties I usually hosted. She liked parties, she just didn't like the formalities associated with our royal guests. Whenever I hosted my international meetings, she had to be there, the fact that she was a grand duchess of Brunhild weighing down on her all the while. It was a lot of stress for her to handle.

Linze had gotten used to it, thankfully. She was a much more shy girl in normal circumstances, but she treated the meetings like playing a

role. She wasn't just Linze during such formal occasions, she was the grand duchess. Though, that was still part of who she was now.

"I wish our children were here..."

"No way... It's basically lunchtime and everyone's already drunk... It'd set a bad example," I said as I shook my head at Linze's lamentation. I could already spy a few acrobats drunkenly trying to do flips.

In this world, drinking wasn't so frowned upon. People often started as early as fifteen. I was concerned that by bringing my kids here, they'd get interested too early. I didn't exactly want to influence them into becoming alcoholics.

Fortunately, my wives mostly shared my attitude toward alcohol. Only Leen and Lu drank. In Leen's case, she enjoyed the occasional glass of wine...while in Lu's case, she would sometimes taste alcohol for taste-testing purposes when coming up with new dishes.

"They're not gonna cause trouble, are they?"

"Nah, don't worry about that. I've got Kohaku and the others looking after them."

Kohaku and the heavenly beasts were with them, along with Albus for good measure. They were on strict orders to contact me telepathically if anything went wrong.

"Where are the kids, anyway?"

"Oh, they're fine too. They went to Parent. I sent them off with some pocket money."

Parent was a popular hangout spot, and it was owned by my old friend Aer. I felt it was fine for my kids to go hang out there. It wasn't like they could get in a huge amount of trouble. Though, I did hope they weren't too noisy, since it'd be bad if they bugged the other customers.

...You know what, maybe I am worried. Maybe I should leave early and go pick them up...

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“I’d have figured Kuon and Yakumo would’ve shown up by now, but Steph’s pretty late too...” Linne said, shrugging her shoulders as she sipped her fruit juice through a straw.

“Where was Steph when it all went off, again?”

“Mmm... I think she was next to Kuon? Don’t really remember, though,” Yoshino replied to Quun as she picked up a handful of french fries. Steph was their youngest sibling, who was only five years old.

“I’m sure they must’ve arrived here by now, though. Why haven’t they called?”

“They could’ve lost their phones. We dropped ours in a river...” Elna replied to Arcia’s grumbling.

When Linne and Elna had arrived, they’d dropped their phones in the Great Gau River, which cut off their ability to contact Brunhild. Yakumo and Yoshino were able to use magic to get around pretty easily, so losing their phones wouldn’t have been an issue for them, but Steph and Kuon were another story.

“I’m not worried about Yakumo so much as I’m concerned about Kuon and Steph...”

“Kuon will be fine, won’t he? He’s a cunning little brat, so I’m sure he’ll figure out a way to reach us,” Arcia spat out some surprisingly harsh words about her brother. Nobody refuted her, however, proving that they were probably true.

“Yeah, that sounds about right. Kuon’s just like our father, danger always follows him. Even father calls him a troublemaker back in the

future... They're one and the same in that regard. Even if they don't intend it, trouble just follows them naturally."

"Mhm... That's true," Quun nodded along with Arcia as she picked at some treats.

Their younger brother had a habit of running into danger, even more than any of their siblings. He'd been nearly kidnapped more than once or twice, and he often had a habit of going overboard when it came to solving problems.

"I'm still not so sure if Kuon can handle things on his own."

"It's fine, he has the seven eyes. He'll probably show up before long. It's Steph I'm more worried about. That girl's always so restless and hard to predict."

Everyone stared over at Linne. They all had the same thing on their minds... Namely, the fact that Linne was equally as restless and equally as hard to predict. She was painfully unaware of herself.

"By the way...don't you want to chime in, Frei? And you too, Allis."

"Mfh?"

"Bgh?"

Quun wearily looked over at Allis and Frei, who were tucking into their own portions of the Special Parent Jumbo Parfait. Their cheeks were covered in whipped cream from how greedily they'd been chowing down.



“It’ll be fiiiiine... Kuon and Steph won’t get hurt out there. You’d need the power of a god to trouble any of us.”

“I’m worried precisely BECAUSE there are enemies out there with the power of a god.”

The wicked devout were still a problem. Their father had defeated the wicked god some time ago, but there were now individuals that had inherited its power.

According to Granny Tokie, the flow of time originally had various possible branches, each with a different outcome leading to a different future. But apparently, the time spirits had allowed the flow of time in this world to stay in a fixed position. No matter what the kids did while they were back in this time period, they shouldn’t have any meaningful impact on the future. If things continued uninterrupted, then they’d be able to return home eventually and all would be well.

However, the wicked devout posed an unexpected threat to this stability. After all, time spirits were no match for the divine, even the corrupted divine. If the flow of time were altered by the wicked devout, then the future could end up irreversibly changed. In the worst case, the children could even end up never being born to begin with.

“Okay, stooop! I know what you’re thinking, Quun...but don’t worry about it, okay?”

“But...”

“We have father here, as well as our mothers. It’ll be fine. Come on, eat this parfait and relax a little. Here, here. Say ‘aah.’”

Quun felt a little uncomfortable being offered a spoonful of dessert, but she did as her sister asked and took a bite. The sweet cream spread across her tongue.

“Jeez... You always make me feel silly for thinking so much, Frei...”

“That’s because you think too hard, Quun. We’ll take care of the wicked devout. We’ll just crush them. It’s that simple.”

“Well, if you say so,” Quun replied. She couldn’t help but be amused at her sister treating the situation so casually. “Still, it would’ve been nice if they hadn’t made off with Chrom Ranchesse’s Ark, don’t you think?”

Quun let out a small sigh as she looked over at the white crown, Illuminati Albus. The little machine sat next to them. Kohaku, Luli, Sango, Kokuyou, and Kougyoku were all eating various treats, but Albus was just sitting motionless in a chair. Machines had no reason to eat, after all.

Quun suddenly spoke to him and said, “Albus... Let me just ask again, do you think the enemy has those incomplete crowns?”

“Affirmative. They likely have gold and silver.”

“And do the gold and silver crowns have the same special crown ability as you?”

“Unknown. Gold and silver remain incomplete. It is unlikely they have the same ability, but the possibility is not zero.”

Incomplete Golems... Without functional skills, they simply served as keys to the Ark. That wouldn’t be so bad...but what if they did have their Golem skills? What if they’d been properly finished, and were able to bestow immense power without demanding a price? Even if they were incomplete, there had to be someone with the wicked devout capable of manipulating Golems. After all, there were those

four-armed Golems that had been there when the Ark was taken. What if they could complete what Chrom couldn't?

"If only I had more information... But we're a bit strapped on that front. In the future, we could just use social media, but what if we— Ow?!"

Frei suddenly karate-chopped Quun on the head.

"Hey! What'd I just say? Stop thinking so hard! Just wait for all our siblings to gather up. It'll be fine."

"I know, it's just..."

"Mh?!"

"O-Okay, calm down..."

Though Frei still had a spoon in her mouth, she positioned her hand as if she were about to strike again. Quun backed off. She knew full well how scary Frei could be when provoked. The other sisters knew better as well, so they busied themselves with their desserts instead of getting involved.

Elna decided to change the subject as she asked, "S-So, what should we do after this?"

"Oh, I wanna go to the guild!"

"Oh, same!"

Linne and Allis raised their voices. Arcia and Yoshino seemed less than enthused about the prospect. The two of them weren't really fighters, and their Null spells weren't suited for combat. Arcia had **[Apport]** and **[Search]**, which were fairly useless in battle...while Yoshino had **[Teleport]**, **[Absorb]**, and **[Reflection]**, which were mostly defensively oriented. They weren't really fond of fighting either.

That being said, Arcia wasn't unfamiliar with hunting down monsters or wild animals she wanted to cook, and Yoshino was proficient enough with Fire and Wind spells. They both heavily outclassed the average adventurer.

"Why the guild, exactly? We're not registered in this era. Hell, we're not even born yet. Surely you don't mean to sign us up again," Quun asked as she turned to Linne, curious to hear her reasoning. There was technically no age limit for registering as an adventurer, but they all looked so young that it was unlikely they'd be accepted as new recruits in this era. After all, no self-respecting guildmaster would send a small child off to die. Though, they'd probably be allowed to register if they showcased some of their real power.

"It's not to register, Quun. It's to sell. Remember? Frei has lots of stuff in her **[Storage]**."

"Oh, that's right! I forgot that you don't have to be an adventurer to sell materials for money," Frei said, clapping her hands together as realization sank in.

The children didn't have much money on them. They were young, but they were still princesses. They lived well and they generally wanted for nothing, though that didn't mean they got a lot of pocket money. The Mochizuki family policy was that if you wanted something, you had to work for it. Sometimes the kids would earn cash by doing things for the guild, other times they'd get some pocket change by helping out their family members.

As far as spending went, Frei tended to buy rare and peculiar arms and armor, Quun spent money on developing her own technologies, and Arcia liked to buy wild and unusual foodstuffs. But whatever the case, their father had insisted they keep the bulk of their earned money in the guild bank, which meant their finances were locked away in the future. They didn't have much on hand at all.

“We’ll head to the guild when we’re done, then.”

“Then I guess this is your treat, Frei.”

“Ugh... F-Fine... It’s on me. I’m the most capable sister, after all.”

Yoshino’s words initially made Frei flinch, but she quickly bounced back with renewed vigor. The three who’d gone hunting were Frei, Linne, and Allis, which meant the money from the guild would be split between them. But Frei couldn’t let Allis pay for everyone, since she wasn’t family. And she definitely couldn’t let Linne pay, since she was the youngest.

After they got up, paid, and left Parent behind, the pocket change Frei had received before going out was completely depleted.

Thankfully, her **[Storage]** still had a bunch of supplies left within, and the materials she’d sell at the guild would yield way more money than she’d spent. She smiled to herself as she sauntered along to the adventurer’s guild, pleased that she’d found a source of decent income.

“It’s been some time since I had a lot of money... I’m gonna buy some cool weapons!”

“Come on now, Frei... Don’t you think that’s a waste?”

“How could it be a waste?! It’s a necessary expense!”

Arcia sighed and shook her head. She couldn’t understand what was necessary about a few fancy swords. Quun simply shrugged her shoulders.

When the kids arrived at the guild, they walked on over to the counter as if it were an ordinary occurrence for them. The adventurers in the guild all went silent, however, as they watched a crowd of children walk through the area. The receptionist seemed equally puzzled when they all appeared before her.

“Er... How might I help you?” Misha, the feline beastman and receptionist at the guild, smiled politely as she asked them that question. Though, judging by the way her ears were twitching, she seemed more than a little confused. It wasn’t unheard of for children to appear in the guild, but it was still rather rare. Some adventurers brought their kids along, while others had squires or servants attending to them. Thus, Misha thought they were here with their family.

“I’d like to sell some raw materials.”

“Hm? You’re selling?” Misha asked as she raised her eyebrow. She’d dealt in the buying and selling of materials before, but never with children. She wondered what they could’ve brought. Probably wild rabbits or birds. In that case, it would’ve made more sense to take them to the butcher. It was a waste of time bringing such small game to the guild of all places.

“Er, I just want to clarify...we only buy parts from monsters and magical beasts... If it’s wild animals, then—”

“Don’t worry about that. We have choice parts from a King Boar, a Bloody Goat, and the tail of a Nidhogg.”

“...What?” Misha mumbled incredulously.

King Boars and Bloody Goats were red-rank targets... And a Nidhogg? Wasn’t that a type of Fiendrake? There was no way these kids had those things.

“Er, girls... This isn’t really the place to play pretend. We have to—”

“Just show her, Frei. It’ll be faster.”

“Oh, sure. Here you go.”

A thud rang out across the room as the body of an enormous goat with shaggy red hair landed on the counter. It was a dead Bloody Goat. The sudden appearance of the dead monster made everyone

freeze up. It wasn't often that a red-rank target got hauled into the Brunhild branch of all places, so everyone was shocked. But Misha being Misha, her surprise was at something else. She recognized that storage magic had just been used... It was a spell that reminded her of a certain person.

Misha glanced from the Bloody Goat to the group of children, then she noticed the little white tiger cub at their feet.

"C-Could it be... Are you with the grand duke? P-Please wait a moment!" Misha said as she turned and bolted up the stairs. She looked shaken. All the adventurers were still stunned. They looked at where Misha had run off to, then back to the kids, then back to the Bloody Goat.

"Oh, Frei. Blood. It's dripping."

"Hm? Oh, shoot. My bad."

Elna notified Frei that the Bloody Goat was bleeding onto the floor, so she promptly stuffed it back into **[Storage]**. She'd put the Bloody Goat straight into **[Storage]** after killing it, so it was still in the same state it was in at the moment it'd died, meaning it hadn't been drained of blood or anything like that. Thus, it had dirtied the counter a little.

The sudden disappearance of the Bloody Goat had the other reception staff staring with their mouths hanging open. All the adventurers in the room were rendered speechless.

"...The vibe in here feels pretty weird."

"Yeah... Everyone's so quiet. Is something wrong?"

Arcia and Yoshino seemed confused. In the future, the children of the grand duke would be known staples of the guild, and while their escapades would stun people, they'd at least be expected. But in this

era, a group of random children had just shown up and started doing the absurd, so it was no wonder people were shocked.

The children didn't realize how overpowered they were sometimes, so they couldn't understand why they'd shocked so many people with something as mundane as activating **[Storage]**.

"Hey, the hell's going on in here?" a man walked in through the guild entrance, yelling to break the silence. He was a giant of a man, standing at two meters tall. His hair pointed up in a mohawk like a cock's comb and he wore a sleeveless leather jacket and a single shoulder pauldron, with a worn-looking axe hanging at his waist. He sauntered into the guild with a group of similar-looking men behind him. If he'd been here, the grand duke would've surely said they resembled punks from the turn of the century.

The mohawked man glared over at the children by the reception desk. It was the kind of look that would've terrified any normal child. But none of the kids were frightened by the man's gaze. If anything, they stared right back defiantly.

"His hair's weird."

The tension was suddenly broken by a casual comment from Linne.

"Pfft..."

The tension was further dissolved by a sudden burst of laughter from behind the mohawked man.

"Hear that?! She said his hair's weird!"

"Bwa ha ha ha! Oh man!"

"Kids sure are brutal, huh?"

"Why you..."

The mohawked man's entourage started laughing their asses off, and before long, the other adventurers and guild staffers were struggling to hold back their own chuckles.

The mohawked man stomped over to Linne, pointed at his own head, and said, "Hey, kid! This is a badass haircut, y'hear me?! It's not weird at all!"

"Chicken head..."

"Ch—"

Linne's savage comment prompted the mohawked man's friends to laugh even harder. Some even fell to the floor. It was at this point that the guild staff and the other adventurers could hold back their own laughter no longer, erupting into a wave of concentrated mockery.

"Hey, Linne. Don't be too rude. He didn't do anything."

"...Okaaay. Sorry..."

Frei told Linne off, prompting her to immediately apologize. Despite her attitude, Linne was generally a good girl. When told she was wrong, she was quick to correct her behavior.

Arcia stepped in front of Linne, faced the mohawked man, and said, "I'm sorry my sister was rude to you, sir. It was unwarranted."

"Oh, uh... Naw, it's fine. I'm sorry I yelled," the mohawked man, upon seeing Arcia bow her head, apologized as well. He felt compelled to mimic her actions.

Out of all the sisters, Arcia and Quun were the most graceful and versed in the ways of etiquette. They were talented dancers and dignitaries, effectively acting as the perfect representative princesses. Arcia's goal in going to formal events was more so she could spend more time with her father, however.

After the laughter died down, one of the receptionists opened her mouth and commented, “Jeez, Tyles, don’t get mixed up with kids. You’ll scare them with that mean face of yours.”

“It’s not mean! I’ve got a totally normal face!” the mohawked man, who was apparently named Tyles, growled back at the receptionist. His friends behind him, on the other hand, all shook their heads and grinned.

“You’re scary, man!”

“Yeah, all the chicks run when you look their way.”

“Your face is way deadlier than that axe.”

“Ugh! Gimme a break, guys! Your faces ain’t any prettier!”

The men started to bicker among themselves at that point.

“Hey, girls! You ain’t scared of my face, right?!”

“No, we’re not scared.”

“See? They ain’t scared! Truth comes from the mouths of babies and all that! Kids got pure hearts an’ pure eyes!”

Linne’s words seemed to cheer Tyles up. He’d apparently forgotten she’d been the one to call him a chicken head not too long ago.

“What’s all the commotion about?”

While the mohawk gang was bickering, another individual appeared. She’d come downstairs with Misha. She had long golden hair and pointy ears. An elven woman who looked to be in her twenties graced them with her presence.

“Ah, the guildmaster.”

“Oh? Are we acquainted?”

Frei opened her mouth in surprise when the guildmaster, Relisha, appeared before them. In the future, Relisha was still guildmaster of

Brunhild, and she looked pretty much the same. She was a person that all the children knew, and they owed a lot to her assistance.

“Are these the children with the Bloody Goat?”

“Y-Yes ma’am! Oh, wait. Where did it go?!” Misha asked. She panicked a little when she saw the countertop was bare.

“Oh, it was bleeding, so I put it away for the time being.”

“...Can you use storage magic?”

“I can, yes.”

Relisha quietly looked at the beasts accompanying the children and connected a few dots internally. She said no more.

“I’ll take you to the harvesting room, then. Come,” Relisha said as she led the children to a special room in the back of the guild, one that was especially suited to taking apart monsters and beasts brought in by adventurers.

The walls of the room were lined with knives, saws, pliers, and other such scary instruments of every shape and size. There was no furniture, save for a bloodstained wooden workbench right in the middle. This room had surely been used to take apart hundreds of thousands of dead animals, but it smelled remarkably clean. It was probably the work of some kind of magic.

“Can you take it out, then?”

At Relisha’s request, Frei opened **[Storage]**, pulled out the Bloody Goat, and set it down on the workbench. The guild’s dismantling team all went wide-eyed when they saw the massive creature, but they didn’t seem too shocked. They were used to storage spells producing monsters in this particular branch. After all, the grand duke, his wives, the grand duke’s siblings and cousins, and the scarf-wearing young man who’d recently gotten gold rank all had some form of storage magic at their disposal. It was supposed to be a rare

skill, but it wasn't too uncommon in Brunhild. That said, they were still surprised that such young children had access to both that magic and the carcass of such a large beast.

Relisha looked at the Bloody Goat, then turned her gaze toward Kohaku, who was following the children closely.

"Kohaku, dear. Are these children relatives of your master?"

"Mmm... In a sense, I suppose they are. Rest assured they're acting in his name, at least."

"Very well."

All the inhabitants of Brunhild knew that Kohaku and the other heavenly beasts were tied to the grand duke, and it wasn't uncommon for them to have conversations. Kohaku vouching for the children was all Relisha needed to trust them.

The other guild staff members seemed somewhat reassured and even understanding when they realized these strange kids had something to do with the enigmatic grand duke.

"So...can you buy this?" Frei asked. She could sense a little bit of tension in the air, so she nervously tried to cut to the chase.

"I don't have an issue with buying this...but does the grand duke know you're selling it?"

"Er..." Frei faltered slightly at the question. She wasn't doing anything wrong, technically, yet she still felt guilty.

The children hadn't been born yet in this era. They weren't supposed to stand out either. Granny Tokie had been somewhat firm when mentioning that.

"Could I check with him?"

"Go ahead..."

Frei gave a resigned nod toward Relisha. Relisha whipped out her smartphone to call Touya, so the kids huddled in a circle and began whispering.

“Father’ll find out...”

“Do you think he’ll make us keep our money in the guild?”

“N-No, that won’t happen. We don’t have guild cards in this era, so we can’t deposit money here.”

The girls weren’t adventurers in this time period, so they wouldn’t be able to use the guild bank. If anything, it was more likely their parents would hold their money for them. Their dad was pretty forgiving, though, so it’d be more likely that their mothers would force that on them.

Relisha hung up her call, turned back to the kids, and said, “The grand duke has given me permission to buy from you, so I’m happy to proceed.”

Just as Frei was about to let out a sigh of relief, Kohaku let out a quiet whisper from behind her.

“...My liege has just sent me a telepathic message. He’s told me to keep a close eye on what you might purchase and report back accordingly if you waste it.”

“Aww...”

“Agh...”

Frei and Quun, who were the most eager to spend frivolously, let out groans. The other children weren’t too disappointed, since they were just happy to have money.

Arcia could easily justify buying luxurious ingredients and other foodstuffs, especially since they wouldn’t spoil when stored with magic. But Frei’s weapon collecting was a fairly intense hobby, and Quun’s development costs could get unreasonably high... Not to

mention the fact that if Quun's experiments failed, the money she'd invested would go to waste. It was highly likely that their parents would deem that kind of spending wasteful.

Frei let out a loud sigh and said, "Even if father says yes, I'm sure our mothers will get in the way of my plans... How annoying..."

"It's fine, isn't it? You're still getting money."

"I guess..."

Allis was right. The materials would bring in much more for Frei than she'd spent at Parent, but she didn't just want money with nothing to spend it on.

"Do you have anything else to sell, by the way?"

"Oh, yeah. We have a few more things."

Despite how dispirited she sounded, Frei took out various other carcasses from her **[Storage]** and presented them to Relisha. She took out a few of the more battered corpses with torn pelts and snapped tusks as well. She knew they'd sell for less, but it was a good chance to offload some dead animals.

"Is...? Is this a Nidhogg tail? Where's the body?"

"Well...we kinda froze it and smashed it into tiny bits..." Frei explained as she gestured toward the pile of frozen meat near the workbench. The body was still technically there, but it wasn't in its original form anymore. The guild's staff looked on in disbelief as they picked up the frozen chunks.

"Hm, this is no good..."

"The skin's ruined, as are the bones. At best, we can process this into something edible."

"What a horrible waste... We could've made so much leather armor from this..."

Linne awkwardly listened to the workers lament the loss of the materials she'd utterly obliterated. Good materials meant good weapons and good arms, and those weapons and arms would protect the lives of adventurers. It was at this moment that Linne realized the true extent of what she'd done.

"I'll be more careful next time..."

"Don't worry so much," Allis said as she gave Linne a gentle pat on the shoulder, quietly vowing to be more careful as well at the same time.

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"Oh, father!"

The kids saw me as they came out of the guild. Elna spotted me first, alerting the rest of them.

"What are you doing here? Isn't the party still going strong?"

"Oh, I was worried, so I left early. Looks like you guys got some extra money, huh?"

"Yes, though sadly, most of the materials went to waste."

"Ugh..." Linne grumbled at Quun's comment.

Hah, yeah... If you mess a monster up too bad, that's bound to happen... No guild staffer worth their salt would let you trade in mangled stuff for the full price.

"So, anything you wanna buy with the money?"

"Yes! The Seablade Cutlass once wielded by the Dread Pirate Jolly should be in the Regulus Empire right about now!"

"No can do. Hilde said no weapons or armor."

"Aww, dang it! I knew it!" Frei kicked the ground and cried to the heavens.

You know, I can't help but feel you're trying to use your jaunt to the past as a way to get weapons you missed out on in the future...

"Er, I'd like to put it toward development costs..." Quun stated as she raised her hand.

Her request seemed reasonable enough, so I told her exactly what Leen had told me: "So long as you tell us exactly what you're planning to develop. If it's not too strange, you can fund it."

Quun patted her chest in relief. It seemed Leen was a little more lenient than Hilde when it came to encouraging her daughter's eccentricities.

"Daddy, I wanna buy candy."

"Huh?"

Yoshino's suggestion took me by surprise. That sounded more like something Frei or Allis would've said. But really, candy of all things? Hadn't she just eaten a ton of desserts at Parent? And it wasn't like they didn't serve sweet treats in the castle either.

"I wanna buy lots of sweet stuff and take it to grandma's school. Then I can share it with everyone! I wanna see grandma."

"Oh, I see..."

The grandma she was referring to clearly wasn't Tokie. It was more likely to be Sakura's mother, Fiana. Yoshino was the only girl who had a biological grandparent in Brunhild. Frei's grandma lived in Lestia and Arcia's was in Regulus, while Quun, Linne, and Elna's biological grandparents weren't around anymore.

"Grandmother Fiana is a fine and thriving headmistress in the future. We've all studied under her tutelage. She's a lovely woman... I think we'd all be happy to see her."

"Huh, interesting. Hmm..."

What Quun said made me think. The kids all wore magical devices that made them look different to outsiders. This was so nobody in the castle would notice how similar they looked to my wives, since it might end up causing a fuss. Though it wasn't like I'd been actively hiding them or anything. Even Doc Babylon and Elluka knew they were from the future.

If I took the god part of the story out and only focused on the Space-time magic part, then maybe it'd be fine to tell Fiana... Though the matter of whether or not she'd believe the story remained to be seen.

"Hold on, I'll ask Sakura about this."

I figured the best person to ask would be the woman's daughter, so I called up Sakura and explained the situation, which she responded to by teleporting directly to my position.

...I get that you can just use your spell like that, but was it okay to abandon the party?

"It's fine... Most of the guests are drunk, so they won't notice..."

"Oh, okay..."

Apparently, Suika had started a drinking contest, and she'd taken down every circus performer one after the other. Now I was definitely glad I hadn't invited my kids.

"So, about Fiana..."

I wanted to introduce her to her grandkids, but I didn't know if she'd believe me or not. Though, if she was like Babylon and familiar with magic, she might find it easier to swallow.

"My mother was raised in Felsen. She understands Space-time magic to some degree, so I think it'll be fine... The only problem is the other person..."

"The other—? Oh. I see."

She was talking about the overlord of Xenoahs. Yoshino was his grandkid too, so he'd probably kick up a huge fuss if Fiana got to meet her and he didn't...which meant I'd probably have to introduce the two.

"Yoshino, what do you think of the overlord?"

"Grandpa? He's lovely. He brings me sweets and treats all the time. But he definitely gets a little overexcited with us sometimes."

It was something of a relief to know his granddaughter didn't spurn him, but apparently, he was still as much of a doting dumbass in the future too.

"Save the overlord for later... Yoshino can meet my mother first."

Sakura promptly cut off my idea before I could even bring it up. Seemed fair to me, though. I didn't exactly feel like making a trip to Xenoahs anyway.

"Let's go see Fiana, then."

"What about the candy?"

"There's no school today, so there won't be any kids. We can treat them later."

"Mmm... Okay."

We gathered all the kids together and used **[Teleport]** to warp to Fiana's house, which was not far from the school. It had a lovely garden in front of it, and it was generally a pleasant little cottage. We teleported right in front of Mr. Mittens, who was sweeping the pathway with a broom.

"Meow my goodness. What an entourage. Do you have business with your mother?"

Mr. Mittens was Sakura's summon, but he basically served Fiana at this point. He commanded Brunhild's cats and generally ran a pretty

tight information network. In a sense, he was one of our nation's intel specialists. Though you wouldn't be able to guess that from the sight of him standing here in an apron, tending the garden.

"Where's my mother?"

"She's on a shopping trip with Athos and the others, but she should be back soon... Oh. There she is! Purrfect timing."

I saw Fiana walking toward the garden with Athos, Aramis, and Porthos in tow. All three of them were cait siths like Mr. Mittens. Athos and the other three were carrying her shopping bags. I wondered if they lived on the school grounds as well. Fiana had ended up becoming something of a cat lady... But hey, at least her cats were useful.

"Hello there, Grand Duke. And you too, Farne. Who are these children? New students?"

"Grandma!"

"Huh?!"

Yoshino ran over and hug-tackled Fiana, who looked more bewildered than anything else.

"G-Grandma?! A-Am I that old?! D-Do I look that old?!"

She seemed more shocked about what she'd been called. Fiana had white hair, but she was only in her mid-thirties. This world tended to have young marriages, so she was probably a bit shocked and upset at suddenly being called a grandma. In my opinion, Fiana honestly looked a lot younger than her real age.

"Um...what's going on here?"

"Oh, well...you see..."

Fiana looked at me with confused eyes, and I couldn't really find the right words to respond with.

“This is Yoshino. She’s my child with the grand duke... Your grandchild...”

“Huh? What?!”

Uh, what?! Y-You’re just gonna up and tell her that, Sakura?!

“Er... Oh... Then...y-you adopted?”

Oh, yeah...that’s the logical conclusion. Sure makes more sense than time travel, anyway. And I don’t think anyone would buy Sakura having given birth to a baby this big either.

“No...she’s my birth daughter. Yoshino, can you show her your horns?”

“Oh, yes. Here.”

A pair of tiny silver horns jutted out above Yoshino’s ears. They were her manifestation of the overlord’s horns. It was proof she was related to the overlord, but it wasn’t actually evidence she was related to Fiana.

“Oh, Yoshino...take off your badge...”

“Oh. Right.”

Quun’s words made me realize part of the confusion. My kids were all wearing badges that had the **[Mirage]** spell baked into them. The badge didn’t affect her immediate family, so we all saw her as the spitting image of Sakura...but to anyone else, she’d look like a complete and utter stranger.

Yoshino removed her badge, which made Fiana jump back in shock due to her sudden change of appearance. There was no denying her similarity to Sakura now.

“What? Huh? Uh...? Wh-What?!”

I really had no idea where to begin.

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“Farne’s daughter from the future, you say?” Fiana still looked shocked as she mumbled and sat back on the couch. Yoshino hugged her side regardless.

I’d asked everyone else to leave for the time being, since I thought she’d probably need time to process matters. Only me, Sakura, Yoshino, and Fiana remained in the room.

“I know you might find it a little hard to believe...”

“Oh, no... Space-time manipulation magic of this level is definitely theoretically possible...and you are an abnormal man, Grand Duke, so I don’t find it that hard to believe...”

...That almost felt like an insult.

“Then are you having trouble accepting it? Is there some issue with Yoshino...?”

“No, of course not. There’s nothing wrong with Yoshino... I just never expected to be a grandmother so soon... I can’t help but feel old, you know?” Fiana smiled as she looked over at Sakura and answered her question. Her feelings were understandable, really. I’d hardly expected to become a dad so quickly either. Why, when I first heard my kids would be coming back, I had no idea how to react at all.

“You’re still younger than you are in the future!”

“Goodness me, dear... I’m not entirely sure if that’s very reassuring,” Fiana’s smile turned a little wry as she responded to Yoshino’s blunt comment.

“Do you love your grandma, Yoshino?”

“Mhm! She plays with me a ton, and she always teaches me stuff! She even taught me magic!”

Magic, huh...? If I remember right, Sakura’s aptitudes are for Water and Darkness, while Yoshino’s are for Fire and Wind.

It was hard to teach magic to someone who had a different set of aptitudes to you, so it made sense that Fiana would be Yoshino's teacher, as she had the same aptitudes as Yoshino. It was quite rare for a person to have dual aptitudes for magic, but Fiana was from the magically inclined nation of Felsen, so she probably had a natural advantage in that regard.

"I never thought I'd see my granddaughter this early in my life..."

"Neither did we."

Life really is unpredictable sometimes. One day you're walking around, and then, bam, you get zapped by lightning and warp to another world.

"Er... Have you told the overlord about her?"

"Umm...not yet, no. We told you first, but we're still not sure how to go about telling him," I mumbled as I glanced to my side and saw Sakura sporting a look of disgust on her face. She clearly wasn't a fan of the idea.

"I don't mind him meeting Yoshino... It's what comes next that's the problem. I know what he'll do if he meets her. He'll go all crazy and lose his composure, and then he'll act out like an idiot... It's annoying."

She wasn't really wrong. I could easily imagine that happening. At the very least, he'd be extremely high-energy when seeing her. Or maybe he'd cry... Yeah, he'd totally cry. Either way, it'd be a pain in the ass to deal with.

"Apparently, when Yoshino was born, the whole of Xenoahs had a parade..."

"Mhm. That's what I was told, and apparently, Uncle Faron and grandfather had a big fight on the day I was born."

...Faron? The hothead prince from Xenoahs? Why was he fighting with his dad after Yoshino was born?

“Grandfather said he’d stop ruling Xenoahs and move to Brunhild so he could be with me all the time, but Uncle Faron fought with him because he said he couldn’t just suddenly abandon the country.”

“Jeez...”

So they had a fight over that, huh? I can already imagine the scene in my head.

It made sense that Faron was mad about it. The Overlord throwing his whole country into disarray over the birth of his granddaughter was a bit much, even for him.

“Grandmother calmed him down and told him off, but even now, he’s still trying to retire so he can move to Brunhild.”

“He’s tenacious, that’s for sure...”

I wasn’t exactly relieved to know he was the same old idiot in the future.

Hrm... Should I tell him about her in this era, then? It might cause trouble.

“What do you think, Sakura?”

“I think it will cause some issues, but if we don’t introduce them, then the other children can’t really meet their grandparents either.”

Mmm... Good point. Yumina and Sue’s kids haven’t shown up yet, but Frei and Arcia will probably want to meet their grandparents... And they’ll definitely get together at the next meeting I host. If they happen to talk about their grandkids and the overlord overhears, he’ll know we skipped over him, which won’t be good for anyone.

In the end, I decided it’d be best to let Yoshino meet her grandfather, and it was clear she’d be happy to see him as well.

“Guess we’ll head straight to Xenoahs, then...”

“Might I trouble you to take me with you?”

“You wanna come too, Fiana?”

“If the overlord happens to get too rambunctious, I can most likely calm him.”

That was a good point. If we could keep the overlord from freaking out without me having to use force, that’d be ideal. It could turn into an international incident otherwise, given my position.

“In the worst case, I can stop him... I’m his daughter... I should be able to hurt him without causing any international incidents...”

That’s not true at all, Sakura! You might be his daughter, but you’re still a grand duchess of Brunhild! Don’t beat him up!

I silently gulped before opening up a portal to Xenoahs. I wasn’t so sure if this was the best idea after all.

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“So, er, in short...this is Yoshino...and she’s your granddaughter, Overlord. Uh...are you listening?”

The overlord sat silently on the couch in front of me. I couldn’t tell if he’d heard a thing, as his expression was blank and stony.

I’d brought Yoshino to Castle Pandemonium in Xenoahs in order to meet him.

“...”

“Hey, pops. What’s the issue?”

“...Father?”

The two princes, Faron and Farese, tried calling out to their father. I was fine with them being present, since they were Yoshino’s uncles and all. The only other people in the room were me, Sakura, Yoshino, Fiana, and the overlord. Everyone here was family, so I figured it was fine to let them know.

The overlord, who'd been frozen still like a statue, finally moved his head to slowly look at Yoshino. I could practically hear his neck creaking.



“...Granddaughter?”

“Yes.”

“Mine?”

“I’m Sakura’s daughter, yes.”

The overlord wouldn’t stop staring at Yoshino. The girl simply tilted her head slightly in confusion.

“She certainly resembles a younger Farnese...but...”

He can’t believe it, huh? Guess that’s not too surprising. We’ll just have to show him proof.

“Yoshino, can you show him your horns?”

“Okay,” she replied. A second later, tiny silver horns protruded from above Yoshino’s ear. The sudden sight caused the overlord and both of his sons to cry out in shock.

The Overlord’s Horns were an unmistakable sign that she was his kin. His sons had the very same horns, after all.

“To have it at such a young age...”

“Her magical abilities must be extremely refined. How very impressive.”

Yoshino’s uncles muttered words of praise among themselves. I glanced at Sakura, who had a very smug look on her face. I had to admit, I felt much the same.

The overlord stood up and walked over to Yoshino before crouching down and meeting her at eye level.

“...You’re really my grandchild?”

“I am, grandfather!” Yoshino replied before giggling slightly at the Overlord’s tense gaze. She sure was cute...

“My grandchild!”

“Mhm!”

“Yes! My granddaughter!”

“That’s right!”

The overlord reached down and grabbed Yoshino beneath her arms, lifting her high into the air.

“H-Hey!” Sakura shouted, almost rising from her seat. However, she stopped when Fiana laughed at her.

“Oh, Yoshino! How old are you?!”

“Nine!”

“You’re nine?! Amazing! You’re so smart for your age!”

“Hee hee hee hee... Not really...” Yoshino giggled and bashfully smiled in her grandfather’s arms.

The overlord cheered, apparently overcome with emotion, before asking me, “Duke Brunhild! Isn’t she cute?!”

“Of course she’s cute! She’s my daughter!”

Isn’t that obvious? Any child of mine’s gonna be the cutest kid in the world... Anyone who says otherwise just can’t see straight.

“What do you like to eat, Yoshino?”

“Candy and treats!”

“Oooh, treats? Hey...Faron, invest our national treasury into the confectionery industry. As of today, we’re turning Xenoahs into an international dessert powerhouse.”

“What?!”

The overlord’s smile stood in complete contrast to Prince Faron’s confused expression. Xenoahs was a land of demonkin, a species that

didn't really care what they ate so long as it was nutritious. Taste was secondary when it came to their food. They had some desserts, but they were pretty basic stuff like dried fruits or simplistic pastries. It wouldn't be bad to start introducing more desserts to Xenoahs, but the overlord's suggestion seemed a bit much. I couldn't blame Faron for being shocked... The old man was already going berserk in his own way.

"I'll have an entire storehouse full of treats for you soon, my dear. What else would you like?"

"Umm...can I take a photo with you and grandma?"

"Ah?! But of course! Absolutely! We'll do it at once!"

The overlord set Yoshino down before rifling through his pockets for his phone. He pulled it out and handed it to Farese. The stupefied prince stared blankly as if to ask "Huh? You want me to take it?" as he awaited his father's next words.

"Well? Take it already... And there better not be any motion blur, so help me..."

"R-Right...?" Farese mumbled as he took the phone from his father and cautiously held it up.

Yoshino stood in the middle, while the Overlord and Fiana stood on either side of her. The little girl smiled wide as she happily held fast to the arms of her grandparents. Everyone in the picture looked so young, though... It was more like a picture of a girl and her parents...which felt a little weird to look at.

"Okay, I'm taking it now..."

The shutter clicked, and that was that. Farese let out a sigh of relief, apparently having gotten a good picture on his first try.

"F-Farnese, would you like to take one with us? A family photo!"

"No. That's annoying."

“Mommy...I wanna take one with you.”

“Okay.”

Even though she’d instantly shot down her father, she immediately accepted when her daughter asked. That was definitely a very Sakura thing to do.

“You as well...”

“You want me in it too, Sakura?”

“Yeah. We’re family.”

Hah... I’ll accept, but this still feels a little awkward.

There was no reason to refuse, however, so I stood by Sakura’s side as the other three sat on the couch in front of us.

“Okay, here we go...”

Just like before, Farese snapped another photo of us. The shutter went off a few more times. These kinds of commemorative family pictures always made me feel uneasy...

The overlord walked over and took his phone back from Farese, immediately checking over the pictures.

“Ho ho ho! What a wonderful picture! I’ll be setting this as my lock screen for sure!”

I peeked over to look at the source of the overlord’s excitement.

Hm. Yeah, it’s a good pic. The best part is Yoshino’s smile, though. Sakura looks a little pouty...and my expression’s kinda stiff.

“Grandfather, send me the picture.”

“Oh, of course! Just give me your number.”

The two princes looked on, incredulous, as their father giddily exchanged phone numbers with Yoshino and began to send her a barrage of text messages.

“I’ve never seen father act this way... It’s somewhat distressing.”

“The old man’s out of his mind... Who would’ve thought he’d fawn over her this much?”

The overlord didn’t seem to care at all; he was lost in his own little world. The only thing he was paying attention to now was Yoshino.

“Oh, Yoshino! Let me show you around the castle! I had a rather interesting taxidermied beast installed yesterday. Would you like to see it?” the overlord asked as he rose from the couch once more. However, Faron grabbed him by the arm to halt him.

“Just a moment, father! You have a meeting with the trade association soon! You can’t just skip it, can you?! Granddaughter or not, you have a duty, remember?”

“Yes! A duty to my granddaughter!” the overlord growled out in response, prompting Faron to sputter in shock.

...We should leave before this gets worse.

“How annoying. All right, Faron. You’re the overlord now. I’m abdicating as of this moment, so you can take over. Xenoahs is yours.”

“Whaaat?! You’re out of your mind, father!”

Wait, didn’t I hear about this already? Isn’t this supposed to happen right after Yoshino’s birth? Did I make it happen early?

“You’ll be succeeding me anyway, so what’s the difference whether you do it now or later?!”

“Weren’t you the one who said I’m unfit to rule until I have a wife?!”

“You’ll still be looking for a wife in a hundred years. I can’t possibly wait that long!”

“What was that?!”

It was true that the masked ball had resulted in a handful of interested ladies looking to court Farese, but absolutely nobody had taken an interest in Faron.

I was about to stand between the prince and the overlord to prevent something terrible from happening, but Yoshino placed herself there before I could move.

“No fighting!”

The two men immediately backed off in response to Yoshino’s sudden outburst, almost as if she’d compelled them by force.

Wow, that’s kinda scary... She’s small, but she sure packs a punch.

“Grandfather, you still need to do your work! You’ll cause problems if you ditch meetings!”

“Oh, I know... Sorry...”

“And Uncle Faron, you’re like a monkey when you start yelling! A no-good ape! Is that how you wanna be?!”

“A-Ah, no... I’m not... I... I’m sorry...”

Yoshino’s tirade had reduced the two strongest men in all of Xenoahs into cowering, apologizing shells of themselves. I’d brought Fiana along to keep the overlord under control, but apparently, she wasn’t necessary.

“She’s almost like a mother telling them off... There’s no way they can defy her... It runs in the family...”

“R-Really? I’m not like that, am I?”

Sakura simply smirked in response to Fiana’s question, leaving her at a loss for words. I definitely knew what Sakura meant, though. Fiana could be really scary when she told naughty kids off at the school. You couldn’t educate kids with kindness alone, after all. Sometimes you needed to make sure they learned from their mistakes. I wasn’t

so sure if I could scold my own kids like that, though... Honestly, the thought alone made me feel uneasy.

A sudden knock at the door tore me away from the sight of Yoshino scolding her uncle and grandfather. A dark elf entered the room. It was Sirius Frennel, commander of the Xenoahs military and personal bodyguard to the overlord.

“Apologies for the interruption, my liege, but we must be off to our meeting...”

“No way! I’m going to play with Yoshino!”

“...Grandfather?”

“I-I mean...we can...play later...”

One glare from Yoshino had the overlord shaking in his boots. It was hard to tell he was an adult at all.

The overlord looked terribly dejected, so I reluctantly raised my voice and said, “Yoshino can use **[Teleport]**, so she can stop by later.”

“Really...? Farne can use it too, but she never shows up...”

“...I’m a grand duchess. I can’t come home on a whim... It’s not personal...” Sakura spoke casually, but I wasn’t really buying it. If anything, Sakura considered her home to be with Sirius and the Frennel family, since that was where she was raised.

“Ugh... It’s unfortunate, but there’s no way around it, I suppose... I’ll call you later, okay Yoshino?”

“You can call her...but only once a day... No long calls either. I’ll check her logs... Oh, and no calling after seven at night. That’s mother-daughter time... And if you start being a bad influence on her, no more calls for you...”

“Th-That’s so cruel!”

Sakura's terms seemed to upset the overlord. I thought they were reasonable enough, though. Without them, he'd be calling her all hours of the day and probably the night as well. It'd be a pain in the ass. Hell, I also had no plans of allowing Yoshino to visit Xenoahs on her own, even if she could teleport in. If she wanted to see them, she needed to ask me for permission and I'd assign her Kohaku or one of the others as an escort.

"We need to go, father! You're in charge in the interim, Farese."

"Of course, brother."

"Ugh... Can't I have a little more time with her?! Just a little bit more!"

"That's enough, old man!" Faron yelled as he dragged the overlord out of the room by his cape.

Coming here was probably a bad idea, huh? Man, that guy's loud when he whines.

"Sorry about my father..."

"Don't worry about it. It's not your fault."

"He's so annoying..."

Farese bowed his head, an awkward look on his face. Even though he'd been stripped of his right to succeed the throne due to that whole incident with Sakura, he was still keenly involved in state affairs. Whenever Faron ascended the throne, he'd surely be there to serve as his brother's right hand. He was a bit of a brainiac, so he'd probably end up working hard for his brother... After all, he was clearly working hard even now. Part of me wanted to do something to reward him.

"Hey, I promised I'd show you around my library a while back, didn't I? How about you come with us now?" I remembered that Farese had shown an interest in books a while back, so I extended that

offer. I wasn't referring to the Babylon library, but the regular one in my castle. It was less esoteric, but it had plenty of rare books.

"Huh?! I-Is that okay?! I wouldn't be imposing?"

"Not at all. If you find a book you like, you can even borrow it. I'll have Yoshino show you around. That okay, Yoshino?"

"Mhm! I wanna show Uncle Farese around!"

"Ha ha ha... Uncle, huh? That makes me feel quite old," Farese said as he smiled, rather awkwardly, at the way Yoshino referred to him. I could definitely relate.

With that, Yoshino's business was done for the day. Now I just had to take Frei to meet her family in Lestia and Arcia to meet her family in Regulus. Surely those countries wouldn't be as annoying as this one. Surely...

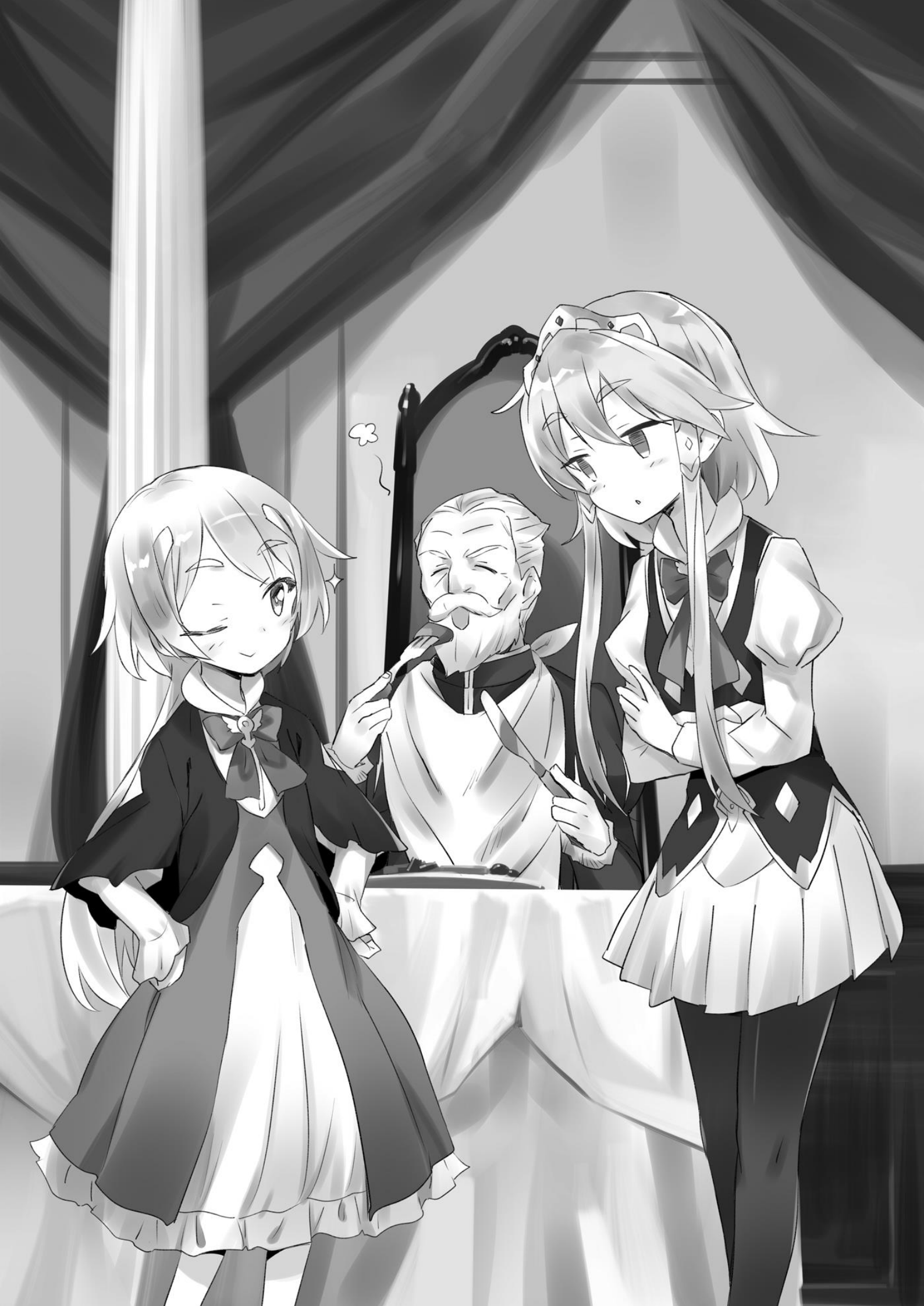
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"Oh! How scrumptious! It's almost as good as Lucia's!"

"Well, that's only natural, grandfather!"

"...Has your sense of taste dulled, father?"

The emperor of Regulus merrily tucked into the meal Arcia had cooked for him, caring little for the harsh words his daughter had thrown his way. As a mother and as a cook, she clearly found his praise a little too generous.



“Wow! That’s Holy Sword Lestia! Can I touch it, grandfather?!”

“Oh, of course! Just be careful.”

“M-Me next! Frei, let me touch it next!”

The former king of Lestia handed his blade over to Frei as the king of Felsen looked on with envious eyes.

The reason why the king of Felsen was here was because his bride, Ellicia, was the emperor of Regulus’s second daughter. In other words, he and his wife were uncle and aunt to Arcia...which also made them my siblings-in-law.

He was definitely on a more similar wavelength to Frei than Arcia, though. The two of them were weapon maniacs. I didn’t really know how to feel about the former king strutting around with Lestia’s Holy Sword either... That was technically the current king, Reinhard’s, property, after all.

Hilde and Ellicia looked at the two weapon enthusiasts with exhausted eyes.

“...I guess I’m just used to it at this point.”

“Same here.”

I wondered if they were talking about the weapon collecting hobby in general, or just how the two of them were behaving.

We were all gathered in Brunhild Castle. From the Regulus party, there was the emperor of Regulus, Crown Prince Lux, Second Princess Ellicia, and her husband King Felsen. Then from Lestia, there was the former king and queen of Lestia, King Reinhard, and old Galen. It was basically all of Frei and Arcia’s close family.

Lu did have another sister named Felicia. Apparently, she was married to some noble or other in Regulus. I didn’t invite her

because she wasn't really close to our family and didn't really come to our conferences. In fact, I'd only met her once in my life... That was why I thought it might be a bit too shocking for her to meet her niece from the future completely unprompted. According to Arcia, they barely interacted even in the future.

"Ho ho ho! I never thought I'd meet my great-grandchild so soon. I feel invigorated enough to live another twenty years!" Galen exclaimed as he snapped a photo of Frei on his phone.

From what I'd heard, he was doing well in the future. Maybe he was in such a good mood because he knew he wasn't gonna die soon... Perhaps being a massive pervert was somehow the secret to longevity. We were all happily eating food prepared by Lu and Arcia and playing with the kids from the future. I was just glad they'd all taken the news so easily.

"I'm quite surprised to have a niece from the future, though... I guess when it comes to your lot, common sense goes out the window."

"Ha ha ha... I guess it does, sorry..."

I didn't quite know what to say to Reinhard, who was probably a bit troubled by all this.

"Well, no matter. I've been meaning to talk to you about an incident in Lestia... Something similar to your tale happened in one of our southern fishing hamlets. Namely, a town named Evra."

The tale Reinhard was referring to was my incident with the Fishmen. I wanted to figure out how far this might have spread, so I mentioned it to the other world leaders, only to discover that there were similar stories from all over the world. Even Lestia, apparently.

"The settlement of Evra was beset by a handful of these fish creatures you spoke of. There were no casualties, but several of the people attacked were infected, and after a short time, they

transformed into similar fishlike creatures and waded away into the water.”

Those who are bitten or scratched by the Fishmen turn into Fishmen themselves... It sounds like a plot from some zombie horror flick, but it's unfortunately real. Those poor villagers...

I wondered what the wicked devout hoped to achieve. Was the Ark they'd stolen somewhere under the sea? Maybe they were using it as a base to deploy the Fishmen...? But then, why transform people? I could only assume it was related to their need for negative emotions. Fear and despair were common negative feelings, and they'd be ripe in the people who knew their bodies were about to become something horrific and inhuman. Perhaps they planned to weave mass confusion and fear into the world...

I made a mental note to put out warnings to all the coastal villages, but I couldn't help but be frustrated. When it was the wicked god, it was just golden Skeletons I had to worry about, but now there were these irritating Fishmen.

Brunhild was a landlocked nation, so I didn't have to worry about my nation at least. Sure, we had dungeon islands that were surrounded by open water, but I wasn't worried about them being attacked because I had a Kraken that regularly patrolled the waters.

I was snapped out of my thoughts by the sound of laughing children.

“Grandfather, this meal's good for your health!”

“Ohhh, how lovely! Let me try it... Ah, delicious!”

“Grandpa, tell me about the legend of our ancestor!”

“Mmm... When our mighty forebear hefted the sacred sword, he scaled the mountain and found the dragon's roost, and then...”

I couldn't help but chuckle as I saw the emperor of Regulus and the former king of Lestia doting on their grandkids. They clearly couldn't

resist the cuteness, and I couldn't blame them. I remembered my own grandfather doting on me in much the same way.

I'd probably be the same with Arcia and Frei's kids... Though, that was surely way in the future. The idea frightened me.

"I'm not gonna let them get married anytime soon, that's for sure..."

"Good grief, Grand Duke... You're thinking about that already?"

Reinhard asked as he raised a brow in response to my muttering.

Sh-Shut up! You've gotta think about these things when you have kids!

"What about you, Reinhard? Any children on the horizon?"

"Oh, well... Not yet..."

I'd met his wife, Sophia, at the wedding...but she wasn't here today. Apparently, she wasn't feeling very well. She was a bit of a frail woman.

"Kids are the best...especially daughters!"

"You might be a bit biased on that front, Grand Duke..."

"I think he is. But I know what he means. Seeing my own daughter inspires me."

"I suppose so! Ah, hm? W-Wait, Crown Prince?! When did you get here?!" Reinhard's surprised outburst made me turn to the side. There, holding a glass of champagne, was Crown Prince Lux of Regulus. He had a small frown on his otherwise plain face.

"I've been here the whole time..." Lux mumbled. It sounded like he was about to cry.

I hadn't noticed him at all. Reinhard hadn't noticed him either, apparently. The man just had no presence, so it wasn't our fault. Frankly, I wondered if he'd do well as the next emperor.

I felt a little awkward, so I quickly tried to shuffle the topic along.

“So, Crown Prince...you have a daughter?”

“I do, with one of my concubines. It was thanks to that peculiar medicine you supplied.”

Oh, the pills I gave to the king of Belfast and Duke Ortlinde... Now I remember, Emperor Regulus wanted some for his son. But damn, three babies came from those pills... It's pretty effective stuff. I should look into selling it.

“When I see my daughter smile, I’m inspired to work hard. I’d like to keep her safe, after all.”

“Yeah, I feel you. I completely understand. It’s the same for me.”

“Tch... You two...” Reinhard grumbled a little at Lux and I talking about our children.

...Whoops, maybe I took it a bit far.

At that moment, Reinhard’s phone began to vibrate. It seemed he’d gotten a text.

“Oh, it’s from my wife... Let’s see h— Aaah!”

All eyes fell upon Reinhard at the sound of his peculiar scream. I had no idea what was wrong.

“Something wrong, Reinhard?”

“F-Father... Sophia... She’s pregnant...”

“What?! Really?!”

“Goodness! Goodness me!”

“That’s amazing, Reinhard!”

“Congratulations, brother!”

Wow, the Lestians sure are excited. Sophia’s gonna have a baby. That’s awesome! Reinhard’s gonna be a dad.

The former king of Lestia held a glass of champagne high up.

“Cheers to my second grandchild!”

“Grandfather, I’m your second grandchild! Bea was born before me, rememb—? Ah... Eek!”

“Bea?!”

Frei accidentally let her mouth run a little too far, causing the Lestian party to erupt into chaos.

“U-Uhm... Father! Help!” Frei yelped as she glanced over at me. But really, what was I supposed to do?

“Well...Tokie definitely isn’t here, so it’s probably fine... Anyway, who’s this Bea?”

“Uncle Reinhard and Sophia’s daughter... Her name’s Beatrice... She’s my cousin...”

In other words, that was the child Reinhard was now expecting... He’d just had the name and gender spoiled.

“Beatrice... Beatrice... Yes, what a name... My daughter... Oh, my daughter!”

Reinhard was happy, which was all that really mattered. Besides, he’d presumably named her that himself in the future...so it was probably gonna be a name he’d like anyway.

“Grand Duke, I must apologize...but can I go home now?!”

“Oh, sure. Go right ahead.”

“Thank you!” Reinhard exclaimed as he charged through the **[Gate]** connecting to Lestia at full pelt. I could understand his feelings.

“What a restless boy... He should be calmer. His child’s coming!”

“Are you sure, dear? I seem to recall you jumping for joy when we had Reinhard... You’re the same as him, if you ask me.”

“Hrmph...”

Everyone laughed at the exchange between the former king and queen.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Hmph!”

“Gyah!”

A Fishman with metallic blue scales fell to the ground, defeated. Another Fishman appeared from the side, but Yakumo brought him down with a swift horizontal slash.

This was the port city of Zagant, west of the Gardio empire. On a map, it would be opposite the coastline of the once-great nation of Isengard. This usually quiet port town was suddenly overrun by mysterious fishlike attackers...

Yakumo had jumped in to save an old man who was about to be torn apart by the beasts. She’d hoped to take a carriage to what remained of Isengard...though the land couldn’t really be called a state any longer. It was more a haphazard collection of suffering cities than anything else.

In order to gain clues about the wicked devout, Yakumo had thought it logical to travel to the place where the wicked god had first made landfall. She’d stopped over in Lassei, but it was easier to get to her destination via boat from Gardio’s shores. It was during this search for a boat that she found herself amid the Fishman attack.

“Hm?” Yakumo muttered as she glanced down at the baseball-sized octahedron that had sprung from the body of the Fishman she’d killed. It glowed a dull blue. She wasn’t sure why, but she knew at a glance that it was something profoundly wrong. Something that shouldn’t be here.

She acted on that impulse and promptly shattered it with her sword. There was no hesitation on her part. Yakumo had been born a

demigod; she instinctively sensed the foul emanation of the muddled divinity within the octahedron.

She cut down two more of the Fishmen, prompting the rest to turn tail and flee into the sea. Yakumo didn't give chase. Instead, she simply sheathed her weapon. Thanks to her efforts, nobody in town had been afflicted by the curse the Fishmen had carried.

"Something strange is going on here, it is..." Yakumo sighed quietly as she looked at one of the dead Fishmen.

It was likely that the golden medicine she'd been looking into was connected to these Fishmen, and that they were both tied to the wicked devout. She began to ponder this deeply, only to suddenly remember that she'd been aiding an old man. She snapped out of her trance and reached down to help the fallen man.

"Are you okay?"

"O-Oh, yes... Sorry. Thank you so much..."

Yakumo helped the man to his feet, only to turn at the sound of approaching soldiers. They all brandished their blades.

Yakumo instinctively reached for her own sword, but the old man intervened, saying, "D-Don't worry, my lady. These men are my guards. I sent them all on an errand, though I see now I should've kept one by my side."

Yakumo felt that it would've taken more than one guard to fend off the Fishmen, but she held her tongue.

The old man reached a hand out to shake Yakumo's, saying, "My name is Roger Wilkes. Though the world knows me as the Professor."

"Huh?!" Yakumo shouted in surprise, which was only natural. After all, the Professor was the alias held by one of the five great gollemancers of the western continent.

Yakumo wasn't exactly familiar with Golems or their technology, but she'd heard that name from her sister far too many times. Had Quun been here, she'd have likely exploded with joy.

"Then these knights of yours..."

"Yes, they're all soldat Golems. They're not human."

That explained why none of them had said anything, though it wasn't like no Golems could speak. Yakumo had spoken to the wolf Golem and the white Golem in her family's castle quite a few times.

"Why are you here, of all places?"

"Hm? A matter of curiosity, I suppose. I heard the witch-king of Isengard had unearthed a massive Golem. I wanted to see it, even if it had been destroyed. Just looking at its parts would've been enough."

The Hecatoncheir was an ancient Golem that had been unearthed and reactivated by the witch-king of Isengard. It had been defeated by Yakumo's father, though pieces of it still remained beneath the ruins of Isenberg. Though honestly, the catastrophic damage the wicked god had done to the area had likely caused even more damage to whatever remnants were still hanging around.

"I see... What a terrible waste. That's most unfortunate."

"Elluka may have recovered some of the more interesting parts, she may."

"Oh? You're acquainted with her, of all people?"

"Well, somewhat..." Yakumo mumbled, trailing off. She hadn't actually met Elluka in this era yet, but she did know the one from the future. She'd created a Golem for Yakumo to spar with when she was a toddler, though it had only lasted three days against the little samurai-to-be.

“Good grief... And she didn’t think to tell me... I’ll have to give her a good scolding next time I see her. But no matter! I’m still curious as to what has become of Isengard.”

“Er, sir... Isengard is quite dangerous lately, it is. There’s a greater number of bandits, monsters, and wild animals. It might not be wise for you to travel alone, it might not.”

Yakumo had been attacked several times on the road, though her attackers rarely lasted long against her. After she’d beaten them down, she always tossed them through a **[Gate]** that led directly to the nearest knight order.

“Now, now, girl. I have my tools. I’ll be just fine,” the professor grinned and patted his armor, but Yakumo couldn’t help but be concerned. The man had nearly just been Fishman food, after all.

Yakumo knew how much this man meant to her sister Quun, so she offered to escort him across Isengard. They were going the same way anyway, and the Mochizuki family always had the habit of being kind to those in need.

“Oh, really? You’d go with me? Well then, thank you...”

“Yakumo Mochi— Er...just Yakumo.”

Yakumo almost gave away her family name before thinking better of it. This man was one of the greatest Golem engineers in the world. Even if he didn’t have a smartphone, he could’ve had access to some kind of comms device. If she revealed her identity, she could risk him contacting someone back in Brunhild.

It’d be fine if he got in touch with her dad. He’d maybe give her a few stern words and a slap on the wrist for traveling around without permission. But the real issue was her mother. Her mother was never one for lectures... She was the kind of person to punish without words. To be specific, Yakumo feared she’d get a hell of a

spanking. It had happened to her a lot as a child, and she didn't exactly feel like being spanked at her current age.

Yakumo had initially traveled around in the past to get in some general training, but now she felt obligated to return home with some kind of lead on the wicked devout. The longer she spent away, the more she felt her mother Yae would be angry at her, so she wanted to come back with valuable information to lessen her rage.

The professor unfurled a map and ran his finger over it before saying, "If we wish to travel to Isengard, we'll have to take a boat from the next town over. See?"

"Oh, that seems right."

Thus began a peculiar journey. One led by a girl, an old man, and five Golems.

Afterword

Hello again, everyone, and thank you for reading the 24th volume of *In Another World With My Smartphone*. I hope you enjoyed it.

The world's not exactly in the best state right now, so if I provided you some form of escape, then I'm happy.

This volume finally saw the debut of Touya's son, Kuon! Though he hasn't exactly joined up with his family yet... You might've been able to guess, but he's Yumina's child.

The naming was a little tricky, to be honest. Touya's name is Touya, obviously, and his father is called Touichiro, so I thought it'd be good to have "Tou" in the son's name too.

I thought up names like Touma, Touri, Toui, and I even considered longer names like Toukichirou. But then, I figured maybe I should just include the "ya" part of his name instead, so I thought up names like Shizuya, Byakuya, Shinya, and so on... However, none of them felt quite right.

So yeah, in the end, I figured...I just need to pick something fast, so I decided he'd be named after Touya's grandpa. Then it could be any name at all. Thus, Kuon was born.

I like that name. It sounds nice.

Sakura's daughter, Yoshino, finally appears in this volume as well. Her name was easy because her mother's named for the sakura blossom, so naming her after the Yoshino cherry blossom was a no-brainer.

The only one we haven't seen yet is Sue's daughter, but she's still a ways out. Like I said in the previous volume, my pacing isn't really at its best with this arc. I made the mistake of mentioning her far too early, I think. Well, whatever. At least the story's pretty lively with all these kids around.

Now then, on to my thanks! Thanks as ever to Eiji Usatsuka, your illustrations continue to bring out the best in my characters. Kuon's really cute. I love how he came out.

Thank you to Tomofumi Ogasawara for taking time out of your busy schedule to draw up Rossweisse for the design specs page at the end of the book. Your mecha designs are incredible as ever.

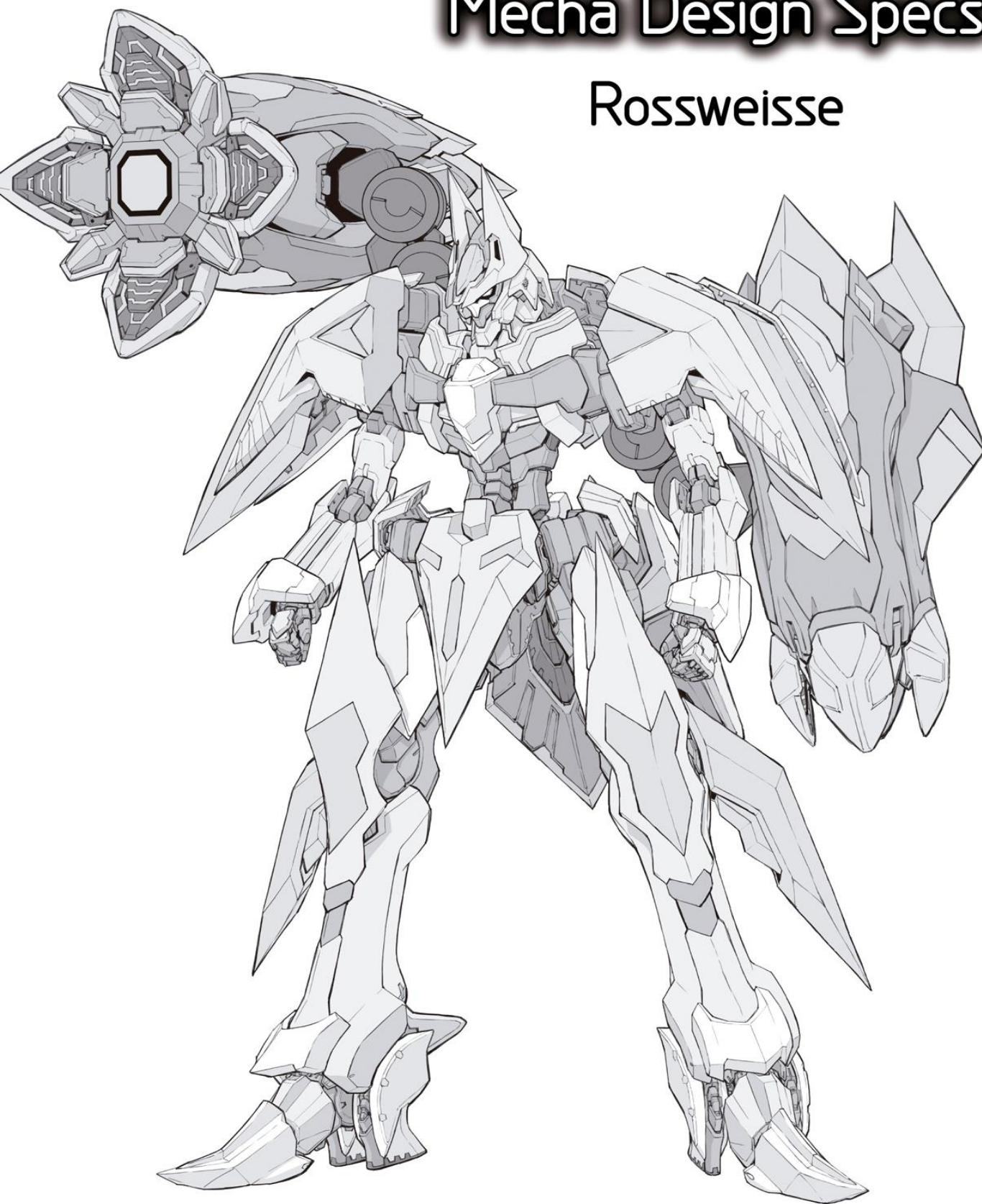
Thank you to K, everyone on the editorial team, and anyone else involved in the publication of this book.

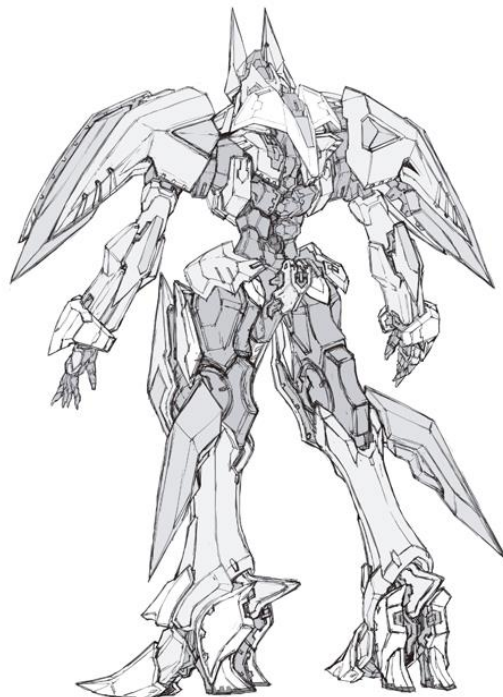
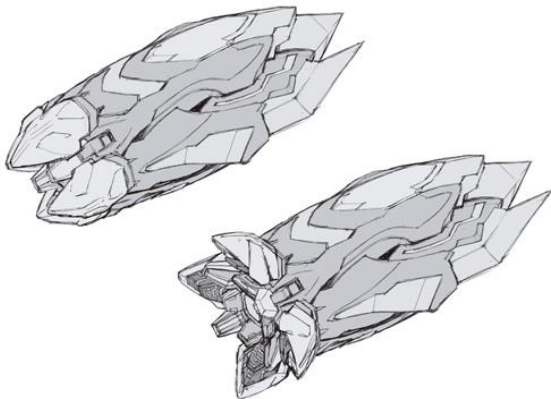
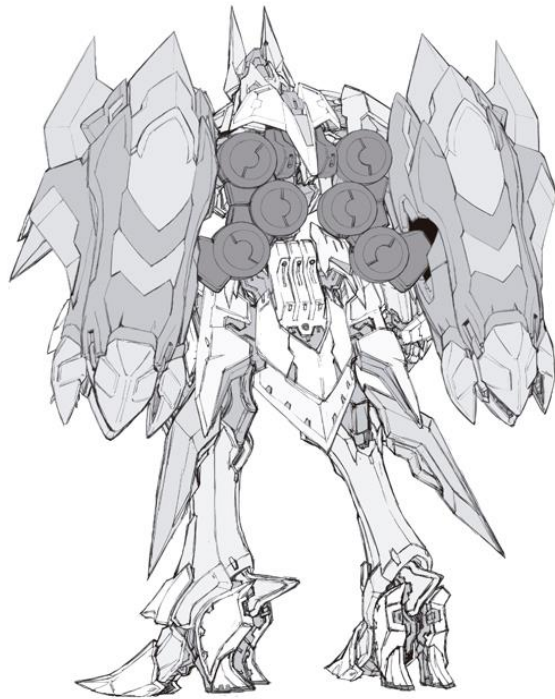
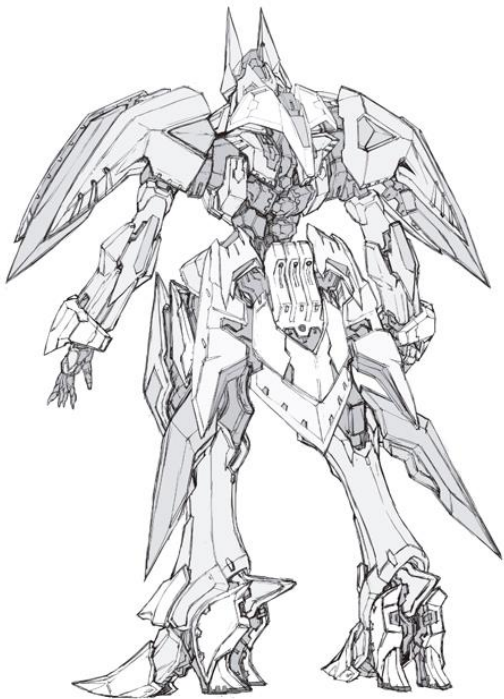
And last, but certainly not least, thanks to all of you for reading. I really appreciate it!

Patora Fuyuhara

In Another World With My Smartphone
Mecha Design Specs

Rossweisse





Developer: Regina Babylon
 Maintainer: High Rosetta
 Affiliation: Duchy of Brunhild
 Height: 16.8m Weight: 9.85
 Maximum Capacity: 1 Person
 Armaments: Arm Vulcan Cannon x2, Symphonic Horn x2

Bone Frame Designer: Regina Babylon
 Administrator: Fredmonica
 Compatible Pilot: Sakura
 Primary Color: Sakura Pink

A new special-model Frame Gear designed specifically for Sakura. One of the Valkyrie Gears, this Frame Gear was designed with battlefield support in mind. The symphonic horns on the back of the machine augment Sakura's singing and allow her to transmit helpful effects across the battlefield. Through her amplified vocal magic, Sakura can enhance the speed, attack power, or defense of her allies. She can also use this in an offensive capacity by activating the reverb function to focus sound waves towards specific targets.

Bonus Short Stories

Troubling Tooth

“Ugh, it never ends...” I sighed quietly as I looked at the seemingly infinite piles of papers on my desk.

There were an awful lot of official things to handle in Brunhild. And there would’ve been even more if it weren’t for Kousaka and Yumina. Their help was invaluable. Yet I still had a mountain of stuff in front of me, and if I stopped for even a day, then it would just mean even more piled-up work...

The actual work was simple enough, but since it was mostly just approving or denying proposals, it wasn’t something I could hand off to someone else. Though, compared to other countries, which had noble affairs and other troublesome matters to attend to, it was all relatively stress-free.

Hmm... Maybe life would be easier if I created some noble families, though... I could hand off some land and let them handle the day-to-day dealings... Ack, wait... I can’t get lost in thoughts. Gotta work, gotta work...

Right as I put my head back down to work, the door smashed open and Linne charged into my office.

“Linne! Don’t barge in like that!”

“Shh!”

Linne put her finger up to her mouth as if to silence me, even though she was the cause of the ruckus to begin with. She then ran right past me and hid in a nearby wardrobe. I tried to call out to her, but she shushed me again and fell silent... Was she playing hide-and-seek or something? As if to answer my question, a knock came at the door.

“Come in.”

“Sorry to interrupt, Touya... Have you seen Linne?”

The person at the door was none other than Linze, Linne’s mother... Pieces of the puzzle began to fit together in my mind, and I realized our daughter must have been on the run.

“Uhhh... No, I haven’t seen her, why? What do you have there?”

I couldn’t help but remark on the pliers Linze held in her hands. It was the kind of thing I’d have expected Quun to be carrying around, not her.

“Oh, Linne says she has a wobbly tooth, so I’ve decided to pull it out,” Linze said then smiled gently, betraying no trace of malicious intent. She earnestly meant what she’d said.

“Can’t you just tie a string around it and yank it out?”

“I tried that, but it didn’t work...so this is the best way to deal with it.” Linze let out a small sigh as she spoke, clicking the pliers.

It was probably just a baby tooth that’d fall out on its own if left alone, but it’d be bad if Linne accidentally swallowed it or something, so it seemed wise to get it yanked out as soon as possible. With that thought in mind, I walked over to the wardrobe and flung it open. Linne stared at me from within, a look of hurt and betrayal painted over her face.

“It’s okay, I’ll take it out. It won’t hurt.”

“...Really?”

I smiled warmly at Linne and sat her on my desk, placing a hand on her shoulder as if to reassure her.

“**[Apport].**”

“Ah!”

A baby tooth appeared in my hand, just like that.

“Did it hurt?”

“It didn’t... Mom, look! It came out!”

“Wow... We should’ve just asked Touya from the start.”

Linze clicked the pliers in her hands again... Something about her expression seemed almost disappointed. It was honestly terrifying. I chuckled nervously, then handed over the tooth to Linne for her to presumably put under her pillow later on.

With that, the two intruders headed out and I set back to work. Sadly, there was still a whole mountain of it demanding my attention...

Stern Studies

“Mooom, I don’t understand this one...”

“Here, look. Compare these graphs... Get it now?”

“Um... This one’s...altocumulus... And this one’s a cumulonimbus.”

“That’s right, Elna! Good job!”

Linne, Linze, Elze, and Elna were studying at a set of desks in the castle library. Frei and Hilde sat at a nearby desk, as did Yoshino and Sakura, as well as Arcia and Lu. The kids were free to do as they pleased, but we made sure to spend some time studying every evening. I didn’t want their future education hindered by my lack of action in the past. Quun wasn’t here since she’d finished her assignment a few moments before running straight back to Babylon. I was glad she was smart, but I couldn’t help but be a little concerned by how focused she was on her eccentric hobby...

We didn’t just study either. We also had more practical lessons like dancing and official court etiquette. Brunhild may have been a small nation, but the girls were still princesses. I couldn’t have them falling

behind their peers. Elze, Sakura, Linze, and Yae were also a bit rusty in that regard, so they shyly used it as a chance to brush up on their own manners. I personally found the whole thing to be a royal pain in the butt, but I knew it was necessary... Plus, at least I became a slightly better dancer as a result.

“So, who was the forty-eighth emperor of Regulus?”

“Huh? Um... Uhhh...”

Yoshino turned to me with a question... A history question. I was completely stumped, which probably highlighted the importance of Yoshino knowing. Unfortunately, I knew basically nothing about the history of this world! As I desperately scoured my empty mind for an answer, the third princess of the Regulus Empire turned to me with a sigh.

“You should know that, Touya! It’s Zephyrus, Yoshino. Zephyrus Roa Regulus!”

“Oh, that’s right! Now I remember! Thanks!”

I stared blankly for a moment... Where had I heard that name before?

“He’s my father, Touya!”

Oh crap! I forgot my father-in-law’s name... Wait, no. I knew his name! I just didn’t know he was the 48th emperor! I don’t even know what number emperor the current Japanese one is, so cut me some slack here!

“In the future, Uncle Lux becomes the forty-ninth Emperor!” Arcia casually dropped a little tidbit of future information for us. That was awfully nonchalant of her.

“You’re in a lot of the history books in the future, father. There’s an awful lot of stuff to remember in our classes...” Frei grumbled quietly.

How is that my fault?! I didn't write the history books!

Apparently, it was normal for people in the future to study my impact on the world and to learn about all the different things I'd done in various countries. Frankly, I felt like that was a bit much... I didn't want people snooping into my personal life!

This might just have to be something I accept, I guess... If they're making plays about me in the future, it's already too late.

"M-Maybe we should take a break from studying for now..."

I was exhausted, and I didn't want to hear anything else about my yet-to-be self. The present was worrying enough, after all.

Fever

Back then, I came down with a bad fever.

I started feeling uncomfortable mid-March, and then my body began to suffer from a strange chill. At first, I thought it was just a cold, but when I woke up the next day, all my joints were aching. I went out to see an otorhinolaryngologist since I had cold-like symptoms, and they ended up jabbing this big cotton swab way up my nose to test me in case it was something worse.

The test came back saying that I didn't have the flu, but the chills persisted and my fever ran up to 37.5°C. I went to my usual clinic, and they told me that my fever was too high and that it would need to be handled at a larger place... It was at that point that I started to think maybe I'd been underestimating the COVID-19 situation a little, so I decided to visit a major hospital to be safe. They told me the best they could do was book an appointment for the following evening, so I did that and went home.

I took some medicine for the fever and chills, then went straight to bed...but I was up in the night with coughs and headaches, and it was so bad that I didn't really get a night of proper sleep at all. By the

time my appointment came around the next day, I was barely functioning. I shambled my way over there to meet with a doctor, who gave me a tube and told me to fill it up with saliva. It was difficult to force myself to salivate in that state. I ended up getting frustrated during the testing process as further chills wracked my body. I honestly thought I was going to vomit.

It reached the point where I was almost crying and sputtering. I was so frustrated that I groaned out, "I can't do it..." but I still managed to just barely muster up the amount they needed. Once I handed that in, they told me they'd get me my results the following day. I was dumbstruck... I thought I'd come to the hospital for an examination, but now they were sending me away? I went back home for another feverish night.

The next evening, I received a call from the doctor who told me I had tested negative for COVID-19. After that, the medicine lowered my fever and I was able to go for a normal checkup at my regular clinic. The whole incident really rattled me, if I'm honest. I realize now that catching a cold like that with the current global situation was careless of me, especially given my weak constitution. It makes me worry about the ongoing pandemic, and I feel so bad for the people who are struggling to work in the medical field with patients like me clogging up their schedules.

I hope that all of you stay safe in these uncertain times. Please take good care of yourselves.



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In Another World With My Smartphone: Volume 24

by Patora Fuyuhara

Translated by Andrew Hodgson

Edited by DxS

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